**A transcript of content from *(Critical) Blindness Studies: Current Debates and Future Directions***

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**Roundtable #6**

**Blind Musicians: Cultures, Identities, Histories**

**Chair: Catherine Kudlick**

**Moderator: Selina Mills**

**Speakers: Sébastien Durand (Université de Tours, France)**

**Flavio Oliveira (Département municipal de l'éducation de Belo Horizonte, Brazil)**

**Wei Yu Wayne Tan(Hope College, USA)**

**Catherine Kudlick** 00:00

Hi, everybody, and thank you very much. I'm Cathy Kudlick, and I'm a newly retired Professor of History; Georgina and I retired on the same day. And I'm Professor of History, or was Professor of History and director of The Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability at San Francisco State University. I'm a white woman with short silver blonde hair and round bifocal glasses. And to celebrate July 4, our Independence Day in the United States, which is a little precarious right now, but I am wearing a gray t- shirt that says in French ‘Bleu, Blanc, Rouge’ and I'm wearing my signature white cane earrings, nice dangly earrings. And I want to thank everybody for the stimulating path-breaking conferences. So we have four, our three, sorry, speakers today, and I'm sorry that Anne-Lise can’t be here. Each one has five minutes to give a summary of their papers, and then I'll raise a few points that tie them together to discuss and then we'll turn it over to the moderator and audience. I have a few questions for the conference as a whole; those of you that have been attending, you will know that these are really kind of guiding questions for the entire conference. And I'll use this as an opportunity to thank the organizers and everybody who is present because this is an amazing, amazing opportunity. And I was emailing with Zina Weygand on over the weekend and we're both very kind of touched that this field is taking off and that you all are carrying the ball. So the three questions are: where do you situate your work within disability studies? How would you characterize or define, define blindness studies? And what different definitions of blindness does your research and/or lived experience lead you to adopt? And if you could address those in your five minutes, that's great and if you don't, we'll bring it up in the questions. So let me turn to our first speaker, Sebastian **Durand, Université de Tours, in France**, and he will speak about ‘L’émergence d’une identité à travers la pratique musicale collective: les orchestres d’aveugles en France aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles.’ Sebastian?

**Sébastien Durand** 02:38

Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you very much for this introduction. And thank you too to all the organizers of this wonderful symposium, where we're fortunate to be able to hear lots about lots of work, very exciting work about blindness studies. First of all, I'd like to describe myself. I'm a white man. I'm about 50. I have mousy hair, short hair, blue eyes and today, I'm wearing a short sleeve red t-shirt. So about my work, because that's what I've got to present very briefly: I'm a musicologist who works on musical studies on the history of music and also on the history of teaching music. And that's what draws together all the work that I've published on blind musicians. And my career has led me to be interested in this subject because I've worked a lot, very early on, on a composer, a French composer and organist called Gaston Litaize who will be the main focus of my attention. I've worked a lot on this musician, and that made me want to include him in my doctoral thesis, which was later published, and that I worked more generally on blind organists. And then, one thing leading to another, I turned towards a broader study on the relationship between music and blindness, and discovering blind musicians and their careers and also the very interesting subject of the transmission of music through the prism of blindness. How do blind musicians, over the centuries, beginning in the 18th century, because I've worked a lot on the early teaching to blind students through the work of Valentin Haüy but I've also looked at Maria Theresia von Paradis an Austrian Musician, a very famous musician, who made popular a number of practices not just in terms of musical knowledge for blind people. But I've also looked at her correspondence and I was able, in my work, to see how she organized learning music under exchanges and discussions with other musicians of our time. And so, my studies on blindness have also looked at musical teaching, because this is looking at the question that was asked at the beginning, I saw that working on teaching music for blind musicians, and there were research that's been done to be successful in passing on music, and reading and writing music for blind people, I saw that exploring this area was also very enriching for teaching music in general and that we could through the things that I discovered in the strategies that were put into place for blind people, you could also generalize this to bring out a number of very interesting practices that could be applied to sighted people. And there were a number of points that have already been mentioned that, in particular, the work on touch by Bertrand Vérine, because touch, of course, is one of the main elements of what's necessary to learn music, particularly with respect to certain instruments that I looked at, for example, piano and organ. And more recently, I've been working for some time on blind orchestras, because there's also a whole part of teaching music to blind people over the centuries, that's allowed, or that sought to organize a group practice by bringing together musicians to form small orchestras, which could be improvised orchestras to support, for example, busking, or more institutional orchestras. For example, the orchestra is at the National Institution of the Young Blind People in Paris, which showed how these music groups were used, using the model that was used at the Paris Conservatory. And so to see the methods used to see how things are done is the sort of thinking that needs to be done about listening and the senses. How can you play music together, when the signs to bring people together won't work through sight? And we looked at all these subjects. I'm very, very interested in all of this. And I intend to continue working on that in the coming years. So I don't want to say too much. I think I've probably used up the time that was allocated to me.

**Catherine Kudlick** 09:00

Thank you very, very much; it’s very interesting, all of this. And what I'm going to do because my comments are geared toward everybody is I'm going to turn to Flavio next and then to Wayne and then we can all talk together. But this is fascinating material. I loved reading your paper. So thank you. Let me turn next to Flavio **Oliveira**. I hope I'm saying that right. I'm not sure; you can correct me **Département municipal de l'éducation de Belo Horizonte in Brazil** and Flavio is going to talk to us about “Les signes de Proust dans les mémoires des musiciens aveugles au Brésil.” So Flavio.

**Flavio Oliveira** 10:01

Good afternoon, everybody, can you hear me? First of all, I'd like to thank the organizers of this conference for the opportunity to be here with you to take part in this really interesting debate. I hope that I can express myself correctly in French, because I don't speak French very fluently, but I'm going to do my best to communicate well what I want to say. To describe myself, I'm a white man, I am 50 ish, I'm blind, and I'm wearing blue glasses, a dark red T shirt, a wine-colored T shirt, a black leather jacket, and I'm in my office at home. Behind me, there's a photo of myself, and the window is closed. I'm in the city of Belo Horizonte. We call it BH for short. And it’s in the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil and what's particular about my state is that we make very good cheeses that I hope one day you'll be able to taste. So about what I'm going to talk to you about. I'm a history professor. I'm- I have a doctorate in Education. And I see myself as a fiction writer, that is the path that I've taken, that I'm going to be taking from now on. So, at the moment, I'm working on, in the, the education departments, with political projects, or for inclusion, and to encourage reading and the work that I'd like to present to you is the results of my research for my Master's that I finished in 1995. It was a long time ago. But now, for a number of reasons, I decided to go and take another look at it. And this conference is interesting to me, for disabled people, for blind people, and that's one of the reasons for that. And when I finished my work, I didn't find a lot of people to talk to about my subject. And now I think that there is an interest in this subject. And that's increasing so that I can find people to discuss it with. So it's a question of recovering memory, by memories. I had four blind musicians who did their musical training in a specialist school for blind people in Belo Horizonte in the first half of the 20th century. I worked with these four musicians, and had long interviews with them about their life stories. And, at that time, all four of them were elderly, and so they are no longer, they are no longer alive. And so, based on these interviews, I can draw a relationship between memory and memories of these five musicians, four musicians and the, the story of the work of Marcel Proust *À la recherche du temps perdu* which was also, how could I describe that, it's a work that talks about the remembrance of things past and the sense of perception. And what I found in this work was that memory, the memory of these blind musicians, had been formed by their contact with their senses and perception. And this was read with the work of a philosopher Gilles Deleuze. And he, his reading of Proust’s work, where we discover four categories of signs that I could find in the stories, the life stories of these four musicians that I interviewed, and these are: the signs of love, a sensitivity, and the sign of arts, with the musicians that I interviewed. And so that means that they were talking about music. And so in my work about memories, the science of perception, and their stories, I think that memory is formed at the time when they were talking about it. And what's interesting is to discover how these musicians acquired musical abilities in the early 20s, early 20th century in Brazil. There are lots of very interesting stories about these musicians. And one thing that's important to say is that between them only one of them was a woman. I haven't been able to find other women trained in music, and- who have exercised the profession of musician, apart from this single woman, who was different from the other three, who were all concert musicians, cabaret musicians, etc. and Louisa, the only woman, continued to be a music teacher in the special institution. And so what I understood was that the condition for a woman to be able to have a professional music career is very different from that of men. And so there's also a gender aspect in this work. And I think that my work is founded in cultural studies of blindness, and also looking at the relationship between memory and blindness and the sense of perception and blindness, and literature on blindness, and of course, music and blindness. I think that for me, studies on blindness are cross-disciplinary studies. We need to be, like in this conference, to be cross-disciplinary. And for me, I consider blindness to be a culture and a way of seeing life which isn't necessarily deficiency. Yes, I see ... that is what I could share with you, I hope that I've been able to communicate okay with my poor French.

**Catherine Kudlick** 20:39

There is a great contrast with all of these three papers and time periods. Our third and final panelist for this session is Wei Yu Wayne Tan from Hope College in the United States. He is going to present to us about ‘Disability, Text and Performance: The significance of one blinded musician's career in Tokugawa, Japan.’ Thank you, Wayne.

**Wei Yu Wayne Tan** 21:04

Thank you very much to the conference organizers, the chair and the moderator and everyone for this opportunity to participate in today's roundtable. My name is Wayne Tan, and I teach at Hope College in the United States. I'm a non-white Asian person. Though I identify myself as a non-blind person, I have significant visual impairment and require corrective lenses for vision. I'm wearing a blue and white checkered shirt and I'm waving at everyone say hello. I am a disability historian of Japan and broadly speaking, I study the early modern and modern periods of East Asian history, through the perspectives of disability studies. I began my research in disability studies by exploring the history of blindness in early modern Japan. My forthcoming book tells the story of how early modern Japanese society created the contexts to make blindness a special kind of disability and how blind people use those contexts to elevate their social status. Let me try to answer the three questions for this conference, but in a slightly different order. As a disability historian, I situate my work on literature and history in the context of disability history, and more broadly in the context of disability studies. There are a couple of ways I have addressed what blindness was and what it was like to be a blind person in early modern Japanese society. We may start with medical sources. This is perhaps not the approach that Disability Studies scholars would expect, because of the focus of disability studies on social history. But I suggest that medical perspectives are useful. In Japanese medical sources, we find that there was no agreement on blindness. But we know by a comparison of sources that blindness was described as severe degrees of visual impairment. And the language itself about blindness reflected a relatively stable vocabulary that includes native Japanese and foreign mainly Chinese medical terms. There are other perspectives on blindness from good sources on social history. Because of the sources, because most of the sources in this area were written by sighted people, we asked what do we do with these sources? The answer is clear: we use them. This is also not the approach that Disability Studies scholars would expect, because of the focus of disability studies on the actual perspectives, written or narrated by people with disabilities themselves. But I want to suggest that we can read between the lines in these sources. For example, in the social commentary on blind people's lives, we learn how the laws apply to blind people, and how some blind people chose to ignore those laws. We also learn what sighted authorities expected blind people to do as work, as blind people, and how some blind people chose to ignore those expectations. Blind people chose what to do with their blindness or blindnesses and when not to assert that right. And in this social sense, blindness was a social identity, a particular status identity in Japan’s social contexts, to be appropriated in certain situations. Since completing and publishing this book, I have been thinking about how the shifting identities of the blind people from that era may give us some ideas to consider blindness in today's terms as a situational difference in sensory perception, and also as a situational identity. Situation is a word that we hear a lot about in fields like psychology and sociology. And I think that there are some benefits to think about blindness this way. I apologize that I did not get the permission rights to post my journal article that I had chosen for the conference, but I provided the information for anyone who may be interested in reading it. To sum things up, this article is about a blind musician in early modern Japan, who made his mark in the traditional musical genre of blind musicians, and whose musical text, though written by his sighted students, is a rare primary source about the career of a blind person. First, I show that literary records can serve as historical records. Second, I draw attention to a question: if blind musicians were blind, how did they use texts? It turns out that making music involves collaboration; blind musicians performed music from memory, while the sighted audiences they entertained wrote down those musical compositions for their records. Finally, this introduction, I hope provides some context for me to talk about what critical blindness studies means to me. Looking ahead, I imagine critical blindness studies to be an interdisciplinary field of disability studies that includes historical studies of blindness and blind people's lives of different time periods and different regions of the world. A lot of the scholarship in disability studies is situated in the here and now; we celebrate that but I also ask that we think about finding and using historical sources carefully and creatively to recover the lives of those blind people in the past, even in the very recent past, whose voices were unrepresented or underrepresented in their times. In this interdisciplinary set up, I also imagined historical studies to be one piece in our collective work to make sense of blindness as evidence of diverse disability cultures. I look forward to our discussion and will be happy to elaborate on any of these points. Finally, I want to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about blindness in Japan. Thank you very much.

**Catherine Kudlick** 27:44

Thanks so much. This is great. And it's, it's so, so rich. I have lots of questions, my mind is spinning, and I jotted some down before and other ones have come up as a result of the presentations. And first, I want to give the panelists an opportunity, if you want to respond to anything that anybody said, please unmute and just kind of comment on anything anybody else has said, and otherwise, I'll start in and talk about a couple of things that came up for me. And if somebody's hand is up, you just have to kind of I don't do the hand raising stuff very well but we have tech support so if anybody's wanting to talk, otherwise ... let's go. Okay, so the first sort of question is, I want to start with the present day, even though, Wayne told us, you know, let's think about the past. But I think one of the things that's interesting is to anchor our thinking in what we associate with blind musicians today and think about how those threads come through history to us in the present. So what is our association with blind musicians in the present day, and I'm thinking, you know, we've got our, our people that everybody knows of, Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, and Andrea Bocelli, the Blind Boys of Alabama, we have examples of blind musicians, but when each of you think about your work, and what you've done with groups, with individuals, with cultures, how does that kind of feed into what you think our understandings of blind musicians today are and how would you translate your work to people that weren't familiar to that history? Would you use these contemporary figures? Or would you say no, they're not useful at all, and we need to kind of look somewhere else to really have this understanding. And if it's okay, I'll start with Sebastien because I'll just go in the order of the presenters. Is that okay?

**Sébastien Durand** 30:00

Thank you for your question. Regularly, when I'm presenting my research, often this is in my classes, with my students I often refer to current musicians such as Stevie Wonder and others that you mentioned straight away because this is very evocative for generations who know these musicians and I often explain to them that the benefits of the research I've done is to show how people have managed to create specialized teaching tracks, enabling these musicians to have access to music and become engaged in musical artistic creation. This, of course, did not happen overnight. And the current musicians we know have been able to study music because of research and endeavors by their predecessors; history is very informative in this respect, showing us how various pathways have been taken to establish musical education which is appropriate for the non-sighted, in particular. One example I've worked on is reading musical notation. How can this be written and, read, appropriately by non-sighted individuals. Many attempts were made in this respect; musical braille is still quite difficult. Braille is understood as a concept by most people looking at blindness, but few people know how this musical notation by Louis Braille himself and some of his friends was a long process preceded by many attempts, which were ultimately unsuccessful. So all of this forms a series of components which are keys to understanding how education has been able to move forward and enabled us through, over, time, to improve training of non-sighted musicians in particular.

**Catherine Kudlick** 32:45

Flavio, what do you think of the notion of blind contemporary blind musicians influence, influencing the past? Or the past influencing what we say and think about blind musicians today?

**Flavio Oliveira** 33:02

Um, could you just repeat the question?

**Catherine Kudlick**

I’ll just repeat the question in French. How does the past influence contemporary musicians who are non-sighted or how do contemporary musicians influence our understanding of the past and the kind of questions we're asking ourselves about the past in this respect?

**Flavio Oliveira**

Well, I... one thing I realized is that today musical education for the blind is very different from what was done previously. For instance, there's schools, or some schools anyway, music for the blind that I know today do not use braille notation in their musical teaching, how good this is the music teachers or non-sighted individuals, the only ones who know braille musical notation. And I think it's important to find a wider spectrum medium. That said, being familiar with a musical history for current generations when it comes to blind musicians can be beneficial for contemporary students and for blind students, in particular. Another important thought is that today's music is, of course, different from that of other times. Today a lot of music is composed digitally using computers. And I think this needs to be taken into account when it comes to the issue of musical education for the blind. And if I could ask a question of my own? So this is for Sébastien. Congratulations, Sébastien, on your paper. What historical resources do you use for your research into blind musicians’ education and practice in the 18th and 19th centuries? Where do you go to find them?

**Sébastien Durand**

Yes, good question. And just before answering, thank you Flavio for your answer, which I fully agree with. And just to say, as well, that as music has changed, Flavio talked about the relationship with digital, which has, of course, changed things and the music itself has changed, so called contemporary music, amplified music, and so on. And this comes back to prior research, historical research, it comes back to oral transmission, or learning by heart, with learning by musicians and groups, and so this no longer necessarily requires the use of written notation or sight reading. So this is an important point to take into account in the relationship with music; many musicians with whom I've worked and continue to work date back to the time when you really needed to use a written score. As to your question, Flavio, on the sources, I've worked a lot with the archives of the National Institute of the Young Blind People in Paris, and also another great resource is the Valentin Haüy Library and Museum in Paris; some archives of a more general nature are also helpful. I've looked at and I'm looking at the life of Valentin Haüy to understand his relationship with music, which I think is quite fundamental, because including music in his curriculum for the blind, as he called it, at the time, was not self-evident, in my opinion; that was not his primary objective. But he very quickly included this in, not least, because he realized that music was an excellent way of advertising, as we would call it today. It enabled him to raise awareness of his work and his pupils and seek benefactors who could finance the curriculum which he had set up. And by doing that, he actually discovered that music was excellent PR, propaganda as it was known at the time. So, this leads us to the thought that music is enriching, has cultural benefits, but can... to get back to what I was talking about earlier, can be a way of asserting one's identity. And another point of my historic research, historical research is that I've looked at a lot of archives from church parishes. Many blind musicians in Paris quickly became organists church organists, and parish archives, so, for example, in Paris, tell us a lot about the relationship between churchgoers and other 18th century individuals with the musicians they employed. So that is brief; of course, there are other sources, but those are the main sources I could refer to.

**Flavio Oliveira** 39:49

I have another question, if I could ask it? In these resources, Sébastien, did you find it in these resources any documents in braille? And my curiosity, is for braille, and has this been conserved?

**Sébastian Durand**

There are very few documents in Braille, in fact, I can't read braille myself, but I will go and find somebody to help me. But there are very few braille documents, because these documents, that sometimes can be minutes from board meetings, et cetera, these are documents that weren't necessarily intended to be handed over to blind people. So there was no need for transcription. There could be some documents when it comes to musical literature. I know that some musicologists have already taken an interest in a very interesting document, which is the work of J.S. Bach’s organ work were published in the 19th century in a version reworked for blind people; he had a lot of blind pupils. And so this edition of Bach’s work revised by the great musician César Franck exists only in a braille edition because it was intended for blind pupils.

**Catherine Kudlick**

That's great. I can see that see that Zina raised her hand. Zina, I think, maybe you have a lot of things to say about this.

**Audience Member**

First of all, thank you to everybody and good afternoon. Sebastian, Flavio, Cathy, and Wayne, I'm really very happy to be at this roundtable. I'm sorry that Anne-Lise can't be here. She has, she can't be here for personal reasons. So I'm interested in what you're saying about archives. You've worked a lot on archives in Austria too not just in France, and on French musicians; you've also worked on von Paradis so you've consulted documents in Vienna and that is important to say that too.

**Sébastien Durand**

Yes. Thank you Zina for saying that. Yes, there is very exciting book in German, by Maria Theresia von Paradis, which is kept at the library in a Vienna City Hall. Thank you.

**Catherine Kudlick**

Great. So Wayne, what about contemporary musicians or sources or anything, you know, kind of just open conversation here.

**Wei Yu Wayne Tan** 43:06

Thank you for this opportunity to talk a little bit more about the situation in Japan, the contemporary situation in Japan, and how that might be quite different than what was happening in the past. Thank you for all these wonderful points about blind education in France. Let me start by saying that the recent Paralympics has really drawn a lot of attention to the situations of people with disabilities in Japan. And I think, in general, if you look at the dominant narrative over the past 10 to 20 years, we see a shift from a story about the dependency of people with disabilities or blind people on the side of society. So we see a shift away from that towards a story about independence, the independence and the autonomy of blind people and people with disabilities. And often times, I think there are a lot of cultural tropes that support this reading of blind people as independent people. In the area of music, of course, blind people have had a really long tradition of performing as musicians as, you know, for the roles, they were known for their roles for entertaining audiences. But I think what's really interesting about this focus on blind musicians in Japan today is this tendency to still focus on some long-standing stereotypes about blind people and blind musicians: that blind people because of their lack of sight are better suited for haptic experiences, are better suited to play and perform music. We also see in the background as these stereotypes work together, the idea of the Super Crip, which, for better or worse, draws attention to blind people, but also reinforces stereotypes. And I think what's also really interesting and important to note here is that while you know there's a lot of education, a lot of programs for blind people to train as musicians, there are also collaborations between Japan and the United States. The focus on education today, and on blind musicians in Japan today, somehow detracts from a broader story of how these blind musicians came to be where they are today. This focus on the modern narrative takes away from the story of autonomy that reinforces ideas that people in the past, people, blind people and people with disabilities, before the modern period did not have, did not make choices, they had less autonomy, they had less freedoms. To a certain extent, that isn't entirely accurate, because as I've pointed out, blind people and blind musicians certainly had choices. They defied expectations, and did what they could with their blindnesses. And the situation in the early modern period was a lot more fluid. Now, I mean, we tend to see a specialization in education; blind students training to be blind musicians with a focus almost exclusively on programs that would help them become blind musicians. But in this early modern period, we see a lot of fluidity in the range of skills of blind people and blind musicians; blind musicians in the past didn't just train in one genre. In fact, they often trained in many genres, the popular ones, and even the less popular ones. And many of the blind musicians, in fact, also worked as masseurs, doing medical massage, because that was, in fact, the default profession of blind people at that time. And we also see, I think, this deep collaboration, these networks, literary and social networks, that connected blind people with sighted audiences and their communities. And I think this connectedness is something that we don't see as much in education today in Japan, the education of blind musicians or blind students. So I mean, just to kind of summarize, my main points, to focus on blind musicians and on disability culture in Japan today, I think says a lot about this shift from dependency to independence. But focusing too much on this narrative, in fact, detracts from this earliest story of fluidity and autonomy.

**Catherine Kudlick** 47:51

Oh, great. Thank you. That's, that's great. And that leads right into another question that I have. Zina, I see your hand. So we would you like to ask a question now.

**Audience Member**

Can you hear me?

**Catherine Kudlick**

Yes, we can hear you.

**Audience Member**

Yes. I wanted to come back to what Wayne was saying. You have worked a lot on these issues on co-operations, for example. And I think that Anne-Lise would have liked to have talked about all of that, but there's a tradition of co-operations and that comes back to what we were talking about earlier with Sébastien and Flavio; Sébastien with the small music groups, the small orchestra system. It’s not the same ideology; it's not the same time in history, but the idea of getting together. And Flavio, you were talking about the group too. And when it comes to the question of corporations and groups, there's also the question of women. And I think it's important to talk about that because in Japan, there's the Women's League of Itinerant musicians. And you, Flavio, you talked about the group that you worked with, about a blind woman. And I think that we could find a way through that in order to be able to exercise your art, to work as a professor in an institution, was one way of doing that. And that brings me to something that Sébastien has worked on a lot, Joséphine Boulay And he wants to make known her work, which is a female composer in the late 19th and early 20th century. And that brings me back to César Franck, because if I remember rightly he was her professor, and she was for example, a composer who was influenced by Massonet and others. And I think that after the glorious years of the Conservatory, where she was guided by her masters and her peers, she finished her career by going back to the Institution of Young Blind People where she'd been a pupil and finished her career as a music teacher, teaching in this institution for blind pupils, so I don't know what you could say about that. Any of you?

**Catherine Kudlick**

Yes, it's a very good question. That was one of the questions that I would have liked to have asked, very pleased that you've asked it; it is really good. That means that we're thinking in the same way, and that's great. Okay, who would like to say something? Sébastien?

**Sébastien Durand**

Yes, thank you. Yes, I'd like to react to that. I've done a lot of work on this musician called Josephine Boulay, who was a remarkable woman, because she was, first of all, one of the first, when you look at the archives of the Paris Conservatory, she's one of the first in the 19th century, to be a pupil in several disciplines, including composition. The composers at that time, that was a subject that came back, was coming back into fashion, composers at that time included very few women. And everything that I've been able to find about Josephine Boulay seems quite singular to see that the musical chronicles of the time in the journals of the late 19th century always point out two things when they talk about Josephine Boulay. The first thing is that she's a woman. And that is pointed out as being a major surprising element, to have a female composer. And the second thing that is said about her is that she was a blind woman. And saying that this was two things that set her apart from other composers. And Zina, as she well knows, she was this woman who started early on her career as a pupil of Massenet, Fauré and Franck, very great musicians of her day. And she didn't have the same career as the other people who were studying with her because once she left the Conservatory, once she had her qualifications, she went back to teach music in an Institution, which was teaching young blind people. And within the walls of this Institution, that was where she died. And she didn't have the career that she could have had if she hadn't been a woman, or if she hadn't been a non-sighted woman. And so it's very symbolic of this question. And the last thing that I'd like, to have this said, so several score by Josephine Boulay that were published during her lifetime, thanks to the help of teachers, and these scores, on these scores, we never find her first name; you find the scores, which are still published today, and they just say that initial J. So that anybody who doesn't know when they buy this score, they might think that it was written by a man, because the initial doesn't indicate the gender, that she's called Josephine, that J stands for Josephine, it might be for Joseph, for example. And so it's quite symbolic of that. And it's really very interesting to study her life.

**Audience Member**

Yes, that's very interesting to see that about her scores. I didn't know that. And what we can say too, is that blind men of her day did have the possibility of careers as organists and they had, they had organ recitals in churches, but as a woman, she didn't have that opportunity. And so I think that the most important disability was in fact to be a woman.

**Sébastian Durand**

As far as being an organist, as being organist is concerned in Paris, in a parish in Paris, that is the case because there were lots of blind organists at the time in the late 19th century. And, of course, that continued into the 20th century, and the greatest organists in France in the 20th century, for example, Jean Langlais, Gaston Litaize, and André Marchal were blind musicians. And so it's very symbolic. But at the time, Josephine Boulay at the very edge of the 19th century, the very early 20th century, we don't find any women holding that kind of position in Paris. You have to wait a very long time to find the first women. It wasn't until a lot later. And so it's really symbolic to see that we can talk about twofold disability, somebody who had a very high level of training, and was a very remarkable musician.

**Catherine Kudlick**

Wayne or Flavio, would you like to answer the question about the role of women as musicians?

**Flavio Oliveira**

Yes. I'd like to observe that in blindness studies, I think it's fundamental and opportune to talk about blindness intersectionally, to see how, because the problem with blindness is that is always linked to gender, or race, et cetera. And you can see all of that in these stories. For example, that Sébastien just talked about, and under, for example, Louisa, who I talked about; her intersectionality is really fundamental to look at these stories of blind people. In the literature, we can see this phenomenon too of writers who've published their work, their research, for example, in the 19th and 20th centuries, without signing themselves as women.

**Catherine Kudlick** 57:25

Thank you. Wayne?

**Wei Yu Wayne Tan**

Thank you, I hope to respond briefly to this question about gender, because I think it's a really important part of the story, not only in the early modern period in Japan, but also in the modern period. I think a story about autonomy is also a story about gender. I wish, I wish there were accounts of like, accounts like that of Thérèse-Adele Husson about blind women or blind musician, blind female musicians in Japan, but we simply don't have those kinds of records. And so we can only speculate based on oral histories of blind female musicians of the late 19th century, what life would have been like, in the early modern period. Certainly blind women had some level of autonomy to choose the work that they wanted to do. But it was a restricted autonomy in comparison with their blind and male peers. There are stories, of course, of blind female musicians who lived together in their own communities. And I think that says a lot about the kinds of bonds that they form. And in fact, these were kinship groups, in which an older, a senior female, a blind female musician became a matriarch of the household. But we also see some of the limitations that they faced. In fact, music was one if not the only viable profession of blind women who wanted to venture out on their own. And it was a lot more precarious for blind women in early modern Japanese society. I have a story about how a blind girl, who was five became, a sighted girl became blind, and her parents didn't know what to do with her. They sought medical cures, but she wasn't cured of blindness. And her parents decided to turn her over to a blind female musician, thinking that perhaps that was the appropriate profession. And, in fact, there was not a lot of support for blind women at that time. So all of this, of course, is to say that, you know, as we think about each blind person, whether a blind man or blind woman, each person has a story, and often these are heartbreaking stories about how they became blind and how they made their decisions to pursue certain professions.

**Catherine Kudlick** 59:47

Thank you. Vanessa?

**Vanessa Warne** 59:48

Thank you so much, Cathy. It's a fascinating subject. Thank you all for what you're sharing. I wondered if Selina Mills would like to comment on this question of gender given her important work on von Paradis? Would you like to do that, Selina?

**Selina Mills** 1:00:00

I did want to do that but I thought, okay, this is not my show, so I’m going to shut up. But so I wrote, I wrote an opera about Theresia von Paradis, which was put on the London stage this April. And one of the hugest discussions we had was exactly what you guys were talking about, which is, how much, if you don't have the historical evidence, and it's a third party, so the evidence we had was newspapers, doctors’ notes, but it's very hard to know what she thought. And just pertaining to the conversation you've just had now, the other thing I wrote down was you writing about gender and autonomy. So one of the things I learned about was 18th-century music publishing, and women found it really difficult to get published, whether it was writing or music, because they wrote music for the domestic, for the home, for the salon. So if you can, if you're a bloke, and you're blind, and you can publish, yay, go for it, and everybody gets out there. But if you're a woman sitting at home in your salon, and you're writing it for mama and papa and that's it, then it's much harder. So there's a lot of, I think you're really, all of us are very interested in this, what I call the external forces that have influenced our understanding of musicians and women musicians. So one of the big dilemmas we had with this opera, so we had a new composer write the music who is an amazing African American writer composer called Errollyn Wallen. And I would say it's more cabaret than opera. But one of the things he did was that everybody on the stage had a disability. And our heroine, Theresa was blind, a blind opera singer. So we wanted to make it something that at least we could get close to a feeling of experience, of lived experience. I don't know if we did it, actually. Sometimes I think we did like a melodrama, which I think unfortunately, opera, opera is a melodrama. And it's always about, you know, you killed my brother, I'm sleeping with my mother. I don't know. [laughter] Anyway, so it's very confused. But what we did, and it's everything you've just said, I just love this conversation as a commentary on the notion of a musician and how we perceive them. And a blind woman musician, who is completely created by the press. Actually, she was called I think, Sébastien knows, she was called the blind enchantress in Britain. In London, The Times of London said she was, I don't know what enchantress is in French. But in English, it was the blind enchantress, which, if you think about it, that's the branding. That's the branding. And that is the problem. So like, why can't you just write music? You know, whatever. So I also want to open, and I hope you don't mind, Catherine, Ms. Kudlick. I want to open the floor a little bit, because I think there must be quite a few questions. And I'm having a problem seeing Google Docs. So if anyone does have a question, please just open your mic and say, Hi, I'm Zina, I'm Vanessa, or whoever it is, and open, open to the floor because I don’t think we've got so much more time. Is that right?

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:03:28

Yes, we are. Yeah, we've got about another 20 minutes, I guess. Thank you for that. And that's awesome. Your intervention, can I, I'm going to raise one more point that I want people to think about, because I think it's related to what we're talking around gender and other things and that is the role of quality in music: how people talk about quality, whether it's good or bad, whether it has a male or a female voice. And I'm just curious about that, historically, how that, kind of, is part of the conversation around music, and the reason I'm eager to bring it up is I think it's a theme that's underlying the conference as a whole that I don't think people have brought up to the surface yet. And I'd like to think about that, you know, is ... there's a sense that if it's by a blind person, it might not be as good or they're being elevated. Or if it's by a blind person, it's got to be better. And I'm just curious where that plays in. And I think gender plays in there too. Because if it's by a woman, it's considered one thing; if it's by a man, it's considered another. So and I'm not sure we need to address that unless somebody really wants to, but I want to put that on the collective conversation for the conference.

**Selina Mills** 1:04:52

Oh, my God; I just need to respond to that very quickly, which is: absolutely, because one of the questions we had from critics on our opera, but was she good anyway? Was she good enough, you know? There's a bloke for Carl Weber from the 18th century who claims to be the author of one of her pieces; we don't know. And, and I'm sure Sébastien will help us with this. But isn't it interesting that someone would even question that she wrote it, you know, but I'm sure other people did, too. So Catherine, I'm going to let you lead because you can sort of, I think some of your questions are so completely bang on and you put your finger on the pulse so, but if anyone wants to…. jump in

**Catherine Kudlick**

… Jump in! No, Selina, it's great. I love this teamwork. I love it. Love it. Love it. And Zina and Selina and everybody; and our panelists, of course.

**Selina Mills** 1:05:43

I feel an emotional wave seeing everybody; I'm like, oh I love everybody.

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:05:49

Thank you. So does anybody want to respond to the question of quality right away? And then and then if not, we'll kind of jump in to audience questions, comments. Yes, Sébastien. I see your hand up, I think?

**Sébastien Durand** 1:06:02

So as to quality, it’s a subjective thing, whether we're talking about blind or sighted musicians. That said, when you look at the career of a number of blind musicians, one becomes aware that most of them were keen to achieve recognition from their peers and this recognition involved being rewarded on institutional circuits. And that is why there is quite a shift in, among the musicians into which I've done research, between those who trained or self-trained within an institution such as the Young, Institute for the Young Blind, so in closed environments, and the point in time in which these musicians continued that training elsewhere, and in particular institutions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in France, were the reference. So the Paris conservatory, first and foremost, and from the time when blind musicians were able to work with the greatest teachers of the day and be awarded in a class, with and without disabilities, they had institutional recognition, which then enabled them to train other pupils and be recognized as educators of the sighted and non-sighted. So recognition and quality is very definitely at the heart of the issue of musicians’ careers. And one other thing, Selina, you talked about Maria Theresia von Paradis, and the issue of knowing how good she actually was; she played harpsichord and piano and did a European tour that lasted several months, years even, in the 1780s, mid 1780s. And we have the media reports of the day with this subjective aspect. But also, we know that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote a piano concerto for her. And if you look at the repertory, which of course I’ve unearthed, these repertories. And when you look at the, this set list, which was quite difficult, demanding, the conclusion one draws is that she was a very competent virtuoso in terms of composition; things are more difficult because she did have some good compositions, but that's no, not so sophisticated as those of other musicians of the day. But she was encouraged in this direction. Certainly, in what I've read, major musicians of her day who praised the work that she had done. So I'll hand it over.

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:09:40

I see that Wayne wanted to say something and I see that Hannah and Zina have their hands up. So let me go to Wayne first because he's in a position of honor as a member of the panel and, and, then we'll go to our audience.

**Wei Yu Wayne Tan** 1:09:56

Thank you. I'll just keep my comments brief regarding this aspect of music and quality. I think one way to think about the early modern Japanese context is to think about genres. There were genres, that were played, or performed exclusively by blind male musicians and by blind female musicians. So it's hard, of course, from today's point of view to really understand what the quality of music was like. But I think that the fact that a person was performing an exclusive genre for blind male musicians would suggest that this person was qualified to play that genre. And I think the same thing can be said for blind female musicians, that they chose to play a certain genre meant that they were qualified to perform that genre. And, and one interesting thing here, I think, goes back to the question of the definition of blindness, these historical records don't tell us how blind people had to be to become blind musicians. And this is a question that I struggle with as I go through the sources. So we have the medical definitions of blindness. And then we have the social identities of, of blind people, people who either self-identified as blind musicians or people who we refer to as blind musicians. But I think one way to kind of think through this is to understand that there was, there was less incentive for a sighted person who could rely on his or her sight, to perform music, to be classified as a blind musician, simply because there were a lot more genres for sighted people to perform, other genres of music. And I think this also raises a really interesting question of how many partially sighted, how many partially blind people, in fact, perform sighted music genres, for sighed musicians, genres, despite their visual impairment, so I think there are a lot of questions within this question about quality and music.

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:11:46

Great, thank you. And can I ask one small follow up question, because we're talking about a blindness culture and all of that that's been a theme in the conference, and what is the blind genre of music? Like what would make it blind? Just curious.

**Wei Yu Wayne Tan** 1:12:03

Thank you. So this has to do with the historical tradition. So blind male musicians, for example, historically performed the Tale of the Heike, which became codified as the genre for blind male musicians. But later on, in the 1700s, and the 1800s, because of the decline in the value of the Tale of the Heike, we start to see music performed on the koto, which is a stringed instrument, and the shamisen, also another string instrument, and there was certainly genres associated, certain songs that were performed by blind musicians. In the case of blind female musicians, I think the record suggests that there was a variety of these genres, especially when you look at Southern Japan. And I think the same can be said for blind male musicians that while there were staple, a staple genre, for example, of the tale of the heyday for the Heike, for a blind male musician, we see also local variations of genres adapted exclusively for a blind musicians.

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:13:06

Great, thank you for that. Terrific. So Hannah, and Zina?

**Hannah Thompson** 1:13:13

Hi, everyone, this is Hannah speaking. Thank you so much. This is a very rich panel. Very interesting. I'm struck by the amount of research that goes on around, around the world actually, on blind musicians, arguably, perhaps more than on other figures in blind studies. And I wanted to ask all of you, how do you negotiate the accusation that by studying something of a stereotype, the blind musician, you're perpetuating stereotypes, or perhaps reinforcing the myth of compensation, which says that blind people are particularly good at doing things to do with music. This kind of relates to what Wayne was saying about specific genres. It's also related to the tradition of the blind piano tuner, the blind organist, and it's also still the case today that schools for blind people tend to teach music, tend to devote more time to music than then, let's say, non-specialized establishments. So, a controversial question for all of you.

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:14:32

It's a really good question. Um, can I call on Flavio just because we haven't heard from you in a while Flavio? Would you like to take this question Flavio, to you?

**Flavio Oliveira** 1:14:46

If you could just repeat the question please, because I'm having a bit of trouble with my audio.

**Hannah Thompson**

So this is a question from Hannah. I want to know, if there is a risk of research into blind musicians, it actually reinforces the dangerous stereotypes, the compensatory myth that blind people are very good at music because they don't see.

**Flavio Oliveira**

Thank you. Thank you for repeating the question and thank you for the question, Hannah. This is a difficult question to address. Certainly, to give a definitive answer to, I believe that everything depends on what your approach to music is: are you teaching music properly in association with other knowledge, including instruments, braille, dedicated teaching methods, IT, as appropriate for contemporary music, with your, with appropriate teaching method, then I don't believe that does reinforce the stereotype. On the other hand, if people are not professional in the way they approach music teaching, somebody who is visually impaired or non-sighted, they receive special congratulations because they're managing to study music despite their condition, this would indeed reinforce the stereotype. I recently wrote, read a very interesting article on this topic. The author looked at the iconography of blind musicians. I can't summarize it right here and now. I think it would take rather a lot of time. But I think I've basically given you my views on the issue, and thank you for the opportunity to do so.

**Catherine Kudlick**

Sébastien, would you like to jump back on to that as well, on to Hannah's question, before we go to Zina?

**Sébastien Durand**

Yes. Firstly, if I could say that one of the ways of avoiding this mistake of reinforcing a stereotype is that whether, whether you're talking about musical historians or historians, they are supposed to be as objective as possible. And all musicians trained by an institution, such as the Institution for Young Blind People, of all the musicians have been trained there. I found some excellent musicians, remarkable people, but also very mediocre musicians, or worse. There are also extremely bad blind musicians, which is somewhat reassuring. This cohort has, has as many bad musicians as good. And this shows that at the time in specialized institutions in the 19th and 20th centuries, there was also a very stringent selection process. And if there wasn't any particular musical aptitude, they were not directed to musical studies, but to manual labor, etc. which perhaps explains that somebody who has not done enough research into it, too quick, might make an over hasty conclusion that blind people are exceptionally good at music. But, in fact, these are just the people who have been chosen to study music, which could also contribute to reinforce this prejudice.

**Catherine Kudlick**

Thank you. Wayne?

**Wei Yu Wayne Tan** 1:19:23

Thank you. Yes. So that's an excellent question. So one thing I would say is that we can approach this question about stereotypes quite differently. In fact, we see how these blind musicians use stereotypes effectively to their advantage. In many of these genres, we see how blind musicians were at the center of their own networks, which I think says a lot about the dependency of the sighted audiences on these blind musicians, for recording the musical compositions. And we also see how these genres gave blind musicians certain power in renegotiating relationships with sighted society; they had authority to demand payment, they had the authority to set the terms of exchange with sighted audiences. And so, I think, one really interesting way to think about this is that this I mean- blind musicians and blind people in general, we're not actively resisting, we're not opposed to the rules of society. In fact, they play by the rules of society to gain the upper hand in their relationships.

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:20:28

Interesting, well, yes, thank you for that great... sorry to rush people; this is a very great situation to be in more questions than time, this is always a great moment, it shows great interest. Zina?

**Audience Member** 1:20:52

There are many things that I wanted to say, which actually have been addressed. But I would like to talk about the quality of teaching. Josephine Boulay is an interesting case, because she was at the Conservatory and she was assessed for her abilities as a musician and a composer. And nobody really thought about whether blindness came into the equation. I think that she was absolutely on an equal footing, because she had qualified from the French conservatory. But, but, it was more because she was a woman that she had difficulties afterwards, not because she was not sighted. And to Hannah’s question- Do we reinforce stereotypes? Well, I think we need to look, researchers such as Sébastien, and Flavio. Wayne, I'm not sure if this applies to you or not. But certainly, Selina: I think you are musicians. And the fact that you are musicians means that you developed interest in a particular topic, blind musicians, and how music, they were taught music. So Valentin Hauy came in, to teach music in an institution. But at the outset, he was not very interested in that. It was more that if you gave a priority to teaching music, there were would be less good elements, who would become street musicians, that was the concern at these institutions that less gifted pupils, with the least social support, would end up in the street, playing the clarinet badly or some other instruments and making a racket for everybody to have to put up with. So this is something of a caricature. But the bad blind musician is another caricature. In the 19th century, a cartoon of a blind man, I think, playing a clarinet saying ‘this is music by the blind, reserved for the deaf.’ Which meant that they were so bad that you know, only the people who could not hear would be able to appreciate it.

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:23:39

Thank you, Zina. I think we are out of time. I’m sorry to cut you off. This has been... and I really, really appreciate it. And Hannah, do you want to have some final word? I know that you're there as the tech interloper, organizer, whatever.

**Hannah Thompson** 1:24:03

Well, I think Selina might want to close the session.

**Catherine Kudlick** 1:24:06

I'm sorry. Yeah, Selina, I forgot my, my...

**Selina Mills** 1:24:10

No worries. So I wanted to say thank you to all the participants and the stories that we are listening to. I think it actually reassures, as Hannah said, it's amazing to think that all this research is going on around the world. And I think it also calls for us to meet more often, if we can, because it seems to me that one of the problems is the fragmentation of knowledge. And it's sort of like we need to have a place that it's, it's in one place, or at least two places. But so I think the thing I sort of wrote down as I was like this is quite fragmented in the sense of, we're all doing so many different things. And it's, it's so important that we have conferences and tables, round tables like this. The things I've taken away from this and I'm sure we'll do a summary later on is the gender issue and the quality music issue. I'm interested in the archives and how we how we find evidence. And I just think music itself is a huge, huge subject. And therefore the fact that when even the fact that we posit blindness and music, sort of always together as Oh, in the same way that as you say, blindness and dreams or blindness and food, as if, as if blindness would give us this, this different take on music. And I think that is something we can all come back to at a later point. Thank you so much all of you. And I'm sorry our other participant couldn’t come in, but I know that we will include her in the round up as we go along. And thank you for your questions. Because if there were more and I'm so sorry, we couldn't deal with everybody. Hannah, I will ask you to ... I don't know how to turn the session off. But thank you. And also thank you to Cathy, who just chaired, your wonderful chairmanship, chairwomanship is phenomenal. And you just have such good insight into the questions that bring us all together. So thank you so much for being part of this this afternoon.

**Hannah Thompson** 1:26:09

Thank you. Yeah, thank you, Zina, sorry, Selina.... and Zina and Cathy, everyone. The next session will start at quarter to. So we've got a little break now, until Roundtable Seven.