

**“Soundscapes of the Spirit:
Cosmology and Sound Art from the Black to the Aral Seas”**

**University of Illinois
Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center
Annual Conference
April 8–9, 2010
Reading Room
Levis Faculty Center**

Organized by:

**Donna A. Buchanan, Associate Professor, School of Music, University of Illinois
Gabriela Currie, Assistant Professor, Department of Music, University of Minnesota**

The recent political transitions and subsequent social tumult throughout eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have witnessed the establishment of new forms of ritual life as well as the revival and transformation of older spiritual or mystical practices and belief systems in which sound—whether musical, verbal, vocal, or of the natural world—is a pivotal expressive and artistic device for communicating with or denoting the divine, signifying social relationships within a larger ecological order or universe, and representing humanity’s position within the cosmos. Through an investigation of song, instrumental melody, timbre, vocalization techniques, instrument construction, music iconography, local music theories and philosophies, and verbal arts such as oral poetry, chants, and incantations (through which the Word shapes the World), this interdisciplinary, international conference will probe the vital interrelationship between sound art and cosmology in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Central Asia from both historical and contemporary perspectives.

While the strategic importance of these three geo-political entities has soared over the past twenty years in regard to global energy resources, international security, the emergence and growth of fundamentalist Islam, and the balance of politico-economic power in Europe and Asia,

they have been the recipient of comparatively little scholarly attention within the social sciences and humanities, and are rarely treated in the same forum. Yet historically, although home to an extraordinary diversity of linguistic and ethnic groups, much of the territory ranging broadly from the Black to the Aral Seas is linked by a web of key trade routes, such as the Silk Road; encounters with Turkic and/or Turkish influences or heritage; the mutual experience of Russian, Soviet, and post-socialist political and cultural influences; and a number of recent, incendiary ethnic conflicts in which belief has played a major role.

The conference will bring together a small, targeted panel of experts from the fields of anthropology, comparative literature, ethnomusicology, folklore, linguistics, musicology, and religious studies to explore contemporary spiritual practices as well as the belief systems upon which they are frequently predicated, using sonic expressive culture as the central point of entree. Participants include Margarethe Adams (PhD candidate, ethnomusicology, Illinois), John Colarusso (Professor, anthropology, McMaster University), Gerald W. Creed (Professor and Executive Officer, anthropology, Hunter College, CUNY Grad Center), Jean During (Director of Research, CNRS), Denise R. Gill (PhD candidate, ethnomusicology, University of California, Santa Barbara), Angela Glaros (PhD candidate, anthropology, Illinois), Natasha Kipp Maki (PhD candidate, ethnomusicology, Illinois), Theodore Levin (Parents Distinguished Research Professor in the Humanities, Dartmouth College), C. Nadia Seremetakis (Professor, cultural anthropology, University of Peloponnese); Kevin Tuite (Professeur titulaire of Ethnolinguistics, Université de Montréal), in addition to conference co-organizers Donna A. Buchanan (Associate professor, ethnomusicology, Illinois) and Gabriela Ilnitchi Currie (Assistant professor, musicology, University of Minnesota). Professors Levin and During will deliver the conference's opening and closing keynote addresses.