

Axel Jansen, German Historical Institute Washington

American Music in Times of Political Crisis during the 1930s and 40s

**Panel Organizer**

Axel Jansen (German Historical Institute Washington)

This panel considers the cultural and political role of music in times of economic and political crisis. The Great Depression and the rise of dictatorships in Europe challenged American culture and politics to regain its footing in an age shaped by fear. The panel focuses on the decade that preceded the U.S. federal government's international deployment of culture by exploring milieus and genres on the cusp of becoming part of American global engagement. As part of a "Faustian bargain" that preserved racial segregation to build a new national state (Ira Katznelson), New Deal programs such as the Federal Music Project (FMP) documented and recognized distinct American musical traditions. The FMP recorded and documented folk songs including black spirituals, hillbilly songs, and Native American music. Vaudeville and minstrel shows had given rise to jazz. The New Deal invigorated a discourse about cultural nationalism among composers of classical music and created opportunities for new roles of music in society. By exploring the role, uses, and transformation of different genres prominent in the 1930s (such as folk, jazz, and classical music), the panel addresses distinct American musical traditions just before each would move onto the larger stage provided by the music industry and radio as well as the national and international uses of music during World War II and the Cold War.

**Presentations**

**The Ironies of Cultural Nationalism in a Transnational Age. Aaron Copland and American Music in the 1930s/40s**

Marcus Gräser (Johannes-Kepler-Universität Linz)

**Alan Lomax and the Promotion of Folk Music during the 1930s and 40s**

Risto Lenz (Universität Köln)

**A European Modernist Far From Home: On Béla Bartók's Role as an Exile in the United States**

Michael Braun (Universität Regensburg)

**Comment: Nassim Balestrini (Universität Graz)**