



## Call for papers

# Frauds & Fakes in Words and Music

University of Richmond, Virginia, May 29–31, 2025

With the proliferation of fake news, synthetic video, and AI-powered chatbots and compositions, deceptive material is all around us. Philosophers like Nick Bostrom have even argued that the world, and everything in it, could actually be a computer simulation. But if technology has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from its imitators, fakes were also with us long before the computer age. One of the most notorious literary fakes – the epic poems attributed to Ossian but written by James Macpherson – became a catalyst for artistic creation in the Romantic era, leading to concert overtures by Felix Mendelssohn and Niels Gade, songs by Franz Schubert, and novels by Goethe and Walter Scott. These earnest misreadings show the extent to which frauds are enmeshed in musical and literary histories.

Spectacles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from phantasmagorias and magic shows to operas and amusement parks, similarly straddled the line between deceptive and illusory experiences. Entertainers perceived to be on the wrong side could be derided as humbugs who willfully defrauded spectators, even though they were paid to simulate a heightened or impossible form of reality. Today, technologies like virtual reality networks promise to amplify embodied experiences online, raising questions about whether simulations of reality might be perceived as real, fake, or something in between. These experiences raise questions about how (or whether) illusions differ from frauds and fakes, which in some cases seem ill-intentioned or motivated by bad actors.

We welcome papers on these and related themes, including songs co-opted (and sometimes contested) in the political arena, AI's absorption of word-and-music source material, questions of copyright or adaptation and the gifts and pitfalls of digital translation. In addition to exploring the “magic mirrors” of spectacle and screen, we aim to discuss power relations in claims of artistic authenticity and the uses of language and sound for ideological sway. The conference will build on existing scholarship on the borrowings, misreadings, and manipulations that have both inspired and plagued creative artists, in order to bring added relevance to word and music studies today.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Music, propaganda and conspiracy (“fake news”)
- A.I.-powered music
- Copyright and appropriation
- Translation and adaptation
- Mash-ups and remixes
- Mockumentaries and mockbusters
- Musical notation and transcription
- Online personas in music-splaining (TikTok, etc.)
- Musical illusions and phantasmagorias

Presenters may choose to deliver either a twenty-minute paper or participate in a poster session. (Research in progress may be well suited for the poster session.) Please submit abstracts of up to **250 words by January 1, 2025**, to [wma2025richmond@gmail.com](mailto:wma2025richmond@gmail.com). Presenters will be notified of their acceptance by February 1.

Program committee:

Delia da Sousa Correa (Open University)

Jessie Fillerup (University of Richmond)

Thomas Gurke (University of Minnesota )

Heidi Hart (Linnaeus University, independent scholar)