

CLAS Open Seminars - Lent Term 2026

SG1 Ground Floor, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, CB3 9DP

Monday 16 March - 5:15pm

Book Launch: Music and Political Imprisonment in Pinochet's Chile

Katia Chornik (University of Cambridge)

Abstract: Over 1,000 political imprisonment and torture centers existed across Chile during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet (1973-90). Music was often present in those centers, both as a response to and part of human rights violations. In this pioneering book, Katia Chornik explores the relationships between music, politics, memory, and human rights, discussing a broad range of music experiences and repertoire and how these are remembered, preserved, and disseminated decades later.

The book probes how pieces written, performed, and listened to in captivity are threaded into survivors' memories of mistreatment, resilience, and experiences beyond resistance. Chornik blends sources from the *Cantos Cautivos* digital archive with interviews with ex-political prisoners, agents of secret services, and visitors to prisons, proposing the notion of "memory cacophony" to describe the discordant kaleidoscope of voices, memories, repertoire, and experiences unveiled. Chornik demonstrates how music, as an expression of powerful lived experiences, is an essential component of the cultural history and legacy of the Pinochet period.



Katia Chornik joined CLAS in 2020. Her work explores cultural history, politics, human rights and memory in Latin America. Her first book, *Alejo Carpentier and the Musical Text* (Routledge, 2015), discusses the roles of music in the works of the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980). Her forthcoming book, *Music and Political Imprisonment in Pinochet's Chile* (OUP), blends archival sources with personal interviews with ex-political prisoners, state agents and other witnesses, examining wide-ranging lived experiences in political detention and torture centres, and how these are remembered, preserved, and disseminated decades later. Katia's book is prologue by Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Women Executive Director.

Katia is the founder of the [*Cantos Cautivos*](#) project, which holds over 160 testimonies of music experiences under political imprisonment. Hailed as "an extraordinary digital archive" by *The*

New Yorker critic Alex Ross, her project was featured in a British Museum exhibition and in manifold media reports. Katia is currently working with UNESCO, Chile's Ministry of Education and the National Archive to create human rights education resources based on *Cantos Cautivos*, to be used by schools as part of the national curriculum.

Besides her articles in peer-reviewed journals, she has written for the BBC, *The Guardian*, *Times Higher Education*, *The Economist*, *The Conversation*, and *Open Democracy*, among other outlets. Katia's research and engagement work has been funded by the Leverhulme Trust, Chile's Ministry of Culture, and UNESCO. She has worked in HE impact management and in the cultural and public sectors in the UK and Chile. She is currently a member of the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement's Inclusion Advisory Group and an Amnesty International volunteer. She holds degrees from the Catholic University of Chile, the Royal Academy of Music, and The Open University, and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Read the article: [The power of music in Pinochet's Chile](#)

