

Co-Conveners: UNC–Chapel Hill, Department of Music

Sunday, 3 March 2019

5:00–7:00 pm | UNC–Chapel Hill | Hamilton Hall 569

KIRA THURMAN

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Depts. of History and German Languages and Literatures



Singing Schubert, Hearing Race: Black Concert Singers and the German *Lied* in Interwar Central Europe

The presentation explores the rise in popularity of African American classical musicians in interwar Germany and Austria. Singing Lieder by Schubert, Brahms, and others, they challenged audiences' expectations of what a black performer looked and sounded like in the transatlantic "jazz age." Audiences labeled the singers "negroes with white souls," and marveled at their musical mastery. If the listener closed his or her eyes and listened, these African American musicians, many remarked, "sounded like Germans." How had they managed to accomplish this feat? By exploring Austrian and German reception of black singers, this presentation finds a new way to answer the question, "Can someone be black and German?" by instead asking another: "What has it meant to be black and to perform German music?"

Kira Thurman is assistant professor of History and Germanic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. A classically-trained pianist, she earned her PhD in history from the University of Rochester in 2013. Her research focuses on two separate topics that occasionally converge: the relationship between music and national identity in European history, and Europe's historical and contemporary relationship with the black diaspora.

Moderator: Annegret Fauser | UNC–Chapel Hill, Department of Music

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