

Asher Tobin Chodos
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To the selection committee at the College of Performing Arts, The New School –

I am writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor of Musicology. I hold a Ph. D. in Music from UC San Diego, where I was the first student ever to pursue a dual emphasis in scholarship and composition. As a researcher, I have a strong record of interdisciplinary publication, combining traditional musicology with science and technology studies and computer science. I am equally at home in composed and improvised idioms, which is a dichotomy that I have explored as a scholar. At the New School, I can offer a broad range of courses, from traditional fare to interdisciplinary courses and artist-scholar offerings. I will be an active scholar, a dedicated teacher, and I will work to hone a vision for the role of musicology in the conservatory environment that bridges musical subdisciplines and reaches out to other academic areas.

I have taught university courses in the history of Western Classical Music, Jazz and Blues, and Hip Hop. These range from core seminars for music majors (“Mus 120-C: The History of Music in Western Culture”) to large, introductory electives (“Mus 17: Hip Hop”). One of the Blues courses I taught was cross-listed with Ethnic Studies and examined race in America through the lens of music (“Blues, an Oral Tradition.”). I can also teach innovative courses on the future of music business in the digital age, and critical courses at the juncture of music and machine learning. I use a variety of pedagogical strategies and have a strong command of educational technologies. My references have observed my teaching and can attest to the warmth and rigor of my classroom environment. My student evaluations have been consistently excellent, noting, for example, that my lectures are “challenging and stimulating” and that I am “knowledgeable, approachable and well prepared every day.” You can view a syllabus from a course I recently taught in the history of Hip Hop at the following URL: https://tobinchodos.github.io/hip_hop.pdf.

This year, I published three peer-reviewed articles. These are in addition to my dissertation, which I successfully defended in December 2019. Two of these articles arose directly from courses I taught, and concern the ethics and politics of Black musical forms in the context of American higher education. One is [a critical history of the blues scale](#) (in *Jazz Perspectives*), while the other [addresses the cultural politics of Hip Hop in university curricula](#) (in *Current Musicology*). The blues scale article was widely discussed in the jazz world outside academia, thanks largely to a [condensed version](#) I published to Ethan Iverson’s blog, *Do the Math*. I also published [an article on automated music discovery](#), which is based on my dissertation and engages significantly with the discipline of machine learning (in *INSAM: The Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology*).

My dissertation, [“Solving and Dissolving Musical Affection: A Critical Study of Spotify and Automated Music Recommendation in the 21st Century.”](#) is one of the first systematic studies of the automated music recommendation industry – the use, that is, of machine learning to

help consumers navigate the glut of musical materials with which every streaming service today confronts them. It is an interdisciplinary project that involves a substantial engagement with computer science and the discipline of critical algorithms studies. As automated recommendation occupies an increasingly important place in the 21st century music industry, humanistic critics have tended to assume the worst about it: that it will homogenize consumption and neuter the critical faculties that music can and should nourish. Technical researchers, on the other hand, have ignored such considerations altogether. I bring these two intellectual modes together for the first time. In the end I argue that there are endemic problems with the theories of musical meaning upon which most recommendation engines are built, and that a close look at their underlying technological architectures usually gives the lie to their marketing materials.

I have had major successes securing extramural funding and organizing departmental events, as evidenced by my Frontiers of Innovation grant, UC Humanities Research Institute award, Asian Cultural Council fellowship, and Fulbright award. I have brought many guest artists and speakers to UCSD, and I would look forward to drawing on this broad network to organize exciting events at The New School.

On a personal note, I have always felt a strong connection to The New School, since I spent so much time in its rehearsal halls as a young jazz musician in New York. Because of its commitment to artistic openness and creativity, I have a strong sense that of all the nation's conservatories, The New School is the best match for me.

I think I'm a great fit for this job, and I would love the chance to visit in person to discuss the position in more detail. I thank you for your consideration and hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Asher Tobin Chodos

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