

[Helen English \(Newcastle\) Musical spaces in the Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles, Newcastle, NSW](#)

Announcement published by Sacha Davis on Monday, April 4, 2022

Type:

Seminar

Date:

April 8, 2022

Location:

Australia

Subject Fields:

Australian and New Zealand History / Studies, Music and Music History, Psychology

The Historical, Cultural and Critical Inquiry Group at the University of Newcastle (Australia) is pleased to announce the third paper in our 2022 seminar series, on Fri 8 April, 10-11am Australian Eastern Standard Time (GMT+10). The seminar will be simultaneously held on campus and broadcast live via Zoom. (Details and Zoom link below.) Our presenter is

Helen English (Newcastle) *Musical spaces in the Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles, Newcastle, NSW*

The Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles was opened in Newcastle in 1871. Under the supervision of Frederick Cane, its grounds became an attractive destination, even referred to as a fashionable place of resort, a retreat from the smoky atmosphere of the coalmines. It was indeed a refuge since it flourished at a time when a harmonious, aesthetically pleasing and calm environment was considered an important means to treat patients and maintain their placidity, an approach termed moral therapy. A key aspect of the approach was the provision of music and in Newcastle this took place both inside and outside the asylum buildings. Music has a long history of being used to calm the mind, change mood and even cure ailments, as well as to excite and arouse. In the twenty-first century, research into the affordances of music in our lives has been led by music sociologist Tia DeNora who argues that music can itself provide an asylum through its encompassing and eudemonic affordances. This paper brings together historical and contemporary views of the use of music in an asylum to examine music making in the Newcastle asylum during the 1870s and 1880s. It draws mainly on newspaper reporting, comparing these with reporting on Parkside Asylum in South Australia to identify

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what was distinctive about the Newcastle asylum's context. It explores ways in which music concerts in the asylum and its grounds created social spaces and how the positive musical experiences shared by visitors and patients might have linked to affordances of the self, body and the social.

Helen English is Associate Professor in Music at the University of Newcastle, Australia and Assistant Dean, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion for the College of Human and Social Futures. She is currently an ARC Early Career Research Fellow; her DECRA fellowship examines creative ageing through engagement with music. She also works with a team funded by Dementia Australia investigating the benefits of engagement with songwriting and art-making for older adults. She is a member of the NSW Council of Women and the Musicology Society of Australia conference committee.

For in-person attendance: Room W202, Behavioural Science Building, Callaghan Campus, University of Newcastle (Australia).

For online attendance:

Zoom meeting ID: 870 4036 3272 (Open from 9:45am)

Password: 783069

To Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android:
<https://uonewcastle.zoom.us/j/87040363272?pwd=QTJQait4ZFFMa1pKYVgzQzhPTHF5Zz09>

The event will not be recorded.

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