Expanding the scope of musicological reception history, this research investigates musical performance and identity by drawing on blogs about musical experiences as primary source material. The blog’s generic tendency towards personal disclosure provides the researcher unprecedented access into the processes of identity creation on an individual level. Scholars of computer-mediated communication have demonstrated that blogging creates an intensification of the self as well the implications of social media’s dialogism in emergent macro-social issues. Developing theories of identity, this project focuses on spectator responses to external artistic stimuli – a musical event in culture – in the process of creating personal, social, and national selves. Until now reception history has been limited to newspaper reviews, memoirs, and interviews, but the technology of the internet opens a new window into how “ordinary audience members” integrate a musical event into their identity.

As a case study, this project pinpoints a unique moment in Russian music history — spectator responses to the Bolshoi Theater’s scandalous reinterpretation of Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin (2006). The director Dmitri Tcherniakov set the classic story of unrequited love in the early Soviet period and reworked Tchaikovsky’s romantic characters into multivalent, emotionally-troubled, and sometimes cruel people. His iconoclastic staging sparked a debate about beauty, sincerity, and the role of classic opera contemporary Russian life. This study exhibits multiple modes of engagement with the opera as individuals “make sense of” the scandal and performance by posting online, and through this process reconsider their personal, social, and national selves. Examining spectator responses to Tcherniakov’s Onegin, this project reveals a new way of doing musicology for the twenty-first century.