

Fragmented Musical Cultures c.1150–1350

International Conference of the European Research Council Project BROKENSONG,
Department of Music/Arts and Humanities Institute, Maynooth University

14–16 May 2026

What does it mean for a culture to write its music down? The five-year [ERC Consolidator Grant project BROKENSONG \(2023–2028\)](#) led by Karen Desmond examines polyphonic singing in medieval Britain and Ireland during a transformative period of western music history, c.1150–1350, when written books devoted to polyphony begin to proliferate. The Insular polyphonic sources extant from this period—just over a hundred and forty mostly fragmentary codices and rolls—hint at stories of music practice and creation different from those suggested by the highly curated anthologies that survive from continental Europe, and around which the history of western music was constructed. BROKENSONG examines the relationship between music's material culture and processes of music creation in the later Middle Ages and contextualizes these fragmented survivals of Insular music writing and practice within specific music communities.

This two-day conference seeks to stimulate discussion centring on the materialities of music-making between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. While BROKENSONG focuses on Insular polyphonic sources, we welcome comparative perspectives that look beyond Britain and Ireland and/or draw upon non-polyphonic traditions. We invite proposals that engage with any of the following themes in the period c.1150-1350:

- Music fragments, their afterlives, and their reconstruction
- The intervention of literate musical culture on communal ritual activities, musical practice and/or the creative process
- The production process for music books (and the roles of individuals, institutions and patrons in the making of music books)
- Documentary/archival evidence for musical communities
- Notational technologies
- Correlations between musical notation and musical style

We accept proposals for individual papers of 20 minutes. Please submit a 250-word abstract to <broken song@mu.ie>. BROKENSONG anticipates providing two-nights' accommodation in college for all presenters and has funds to offset a portion of travel costs for early career presenters without permanent positions.

The deadline for submissions is September 30, 2025. Notification of acceptance will be given by November 30, 2025. The conference will take place (in-person only) at Maynooth University, Ireland.

Programme and Organizing Committee:

Dr. Eric Nemerich (Post-doctoral researcher, BROKENSONG)

Dr. Johanna-Pauline Thöne (Post-doctoral researcher, BROKENSONG)

Prof. Karen Desmond (PI, BROKENSONG)

Conference Assistant:

Inês Trindade (PhD student, BROKENSONG)

