2026 UCiP KEYNOTE

COLLECTIVE LISTENING, SOCIAL VIRTUES, AND POPULAR MUSIC

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In this lecture, I will explore how popular music contributes to the cultivation of social virtues—such as solidarity, trust, and mutual recognition—through practices of collective listening. In doing so, I resist Roger Scruton's (1997) claim that popular music signals a decline in moral culture, arguing instead that it can sustain morally significant forms of engagement. Concerts, fan communities, and digitally mediated listening environments create shared affective spaces in which individuals experience themselves as part of a "we." These practices, I argue, provide structured contexts in which socially oriented dispositions can be exercised and reinforced, allowing participants to rehearse forms of attunement and responsiveness that extend beyond the musical context. In doing so, I develop a framework for understanding how such shared practices shape character over time. At the same time, I offer a realistic account that treats musical communities as ethically ambivalent. The same dynamics that support solidarity can also structure and channel collective identification in ways that encourage conformity, exclusion, or uncritical allegiance to an artist or fandom. Pop music's ethical significance thus lies not only in cultivating social dispositions but also in shaping how agents understand themselves as participants in shared normative spaces, where social virtues are continuously exercised, negotiated, and contested.