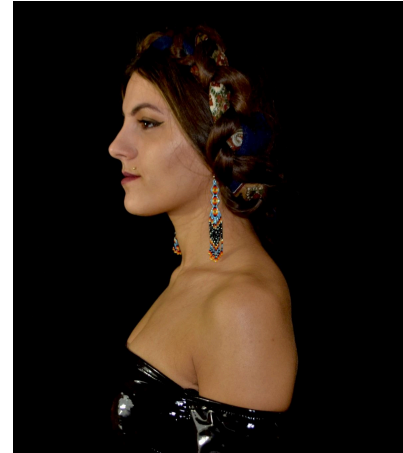


Maria Guerra Sappho, PhD, FHEA

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Artist-researcher working at the centre of counterculture, pioneering feminist, diasporic, and ecological approaches to technology in music. Leads international projects in AI, XR, and immersive performance that reimagine instruments and infrastructures as political, community-driven spaces. Recognised with major awards for innovation in sound and technology, she has presented her work across Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia, and the Americas, from UNESCO Week of Sound to SXSW.



Current Academic & Research Roles

AdvanceHE Fellow

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Digital Playgrounds for Music, University of Huddersfield (2024–26) – Researching interactive technologies and educational impact for REF2029.

Lecturer, Arts with Community, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2025–) – Coordinating sound and music specialisms in community-engaged arts.

Postgraduate Supervisor & Head of Auditions, Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (2023–) – Supervising Masters students in research and creative music production, and leading audition process.

Academic & Artistic Research Roles

Hear Soil Boden Hören (Co-I, EU Consortium, 2025–) – Ecoacoustic and music-technology methods for soil literacy and community engagement, with Prof. Amanda Bayley and international partners (UK, Germany).

Chimère Communities (PI, 2023–) – Global AI-arts activist network (South Africa, Lesotho, Switzerland, UK). Co-develops AI as community practice through workshops, installations, and participatory archives.

Syzygy (PI, AHRC Immersive Arts UK, 2025) – XR ecological installation exploring terraforming and audience agency. With Colin Frank.

ScenIA Network (Research Collaborator, Geneva & partners, 2025) – Improvisation-based AI systems with HEM Geneva, Sorbonne, EDHEA, and IRCAM affiliates.

Diversifying Improvisation (Co-I, Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2022–23) – Researching equity and decolonial practice in improvisation with Prof. George Lewis, Prof. Raymond MacDonald, and Dr. Una MacGlone.

UCPS Collaboration (Co-I, University of Cambridge, 2025–) – Embedding technology led artistic research methods in participatory primary education with Prof. Pam Burnard.

Books & Monographs

MacDonald, R., DeNora, T., Sappho, M., Burke, R., & Birrell, R. (2025). *New directions in musical collaborative creativity*. Oxford University Press.

Sappho, M. (in development). *Intelligences from the underground*. Oxford University Press, first refusal. [Book proposal under development]

Selected Articles & Chapters

- Sappho, M., O’Hear, J., Ponlot, N., Frank, C., MacDonald, M., & Chimère. (2025). Driving Ms. Chimère: Developing community-led interdisciplinary artistic works in collaboration with AI. *ECHO Journal*, Special Issue: Interface after AI.
- McPherson, D. H. & Sappho, M., (2025). I would be an improviser even if I was born on the moon. *Critical Studies in Improvisation*.
- Burke, R. L., Sappho, M., Birrell, R., MacDonald, R., & DeNora, T. (2024). Opening up openings: Zooming in on improvisation in the Theatre of Home. *Psychology of Music*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03057356241247528>
- MacDonald, R., Burke, R., DeNora, T., Sappho, M., & Birrell, R. (2021). Our virtual tribe: Online improvisation during COVID. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.623640>
- Gillies, S., & Sappho, M. (2021). Donohue+: Developing performer-specific electronic improvisation. *Organised Sound*, 26(1), 119–129. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355771821000121>
- Sappho, M. (forthcoming 2025). Virtualities: Virtues of a techno-socio-creative world. In *Musik-Diskurse seit 1970*, Ergon Verlag.
- Sappho, M. (forthcoming 2025). Tracking the social process: Autosociology and interactive aural analysis. *Performance Research Journal*. Special Issue: On Music.
- Mittal, S., Argo, J., MacGlone, U., Sappho, M., (under review). Resonant Networks: Feminist Improvisation across sites, identities, and technologies.. *Improfil* Special Issue.
- Sappho, M. (under review). The posthuman immigrant: Mixed reality terraforming as material new world imaginaries. *AAWM: Music and Nature* Special Issue.

Selected Recognition & Funding

- British Council**, *Connections through Culture* (£10,000, 2025). For Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, Naga Mas, and Perempuan Komponis collaboration.
- AHRC / Immersive Arts UK**, *Syzygy* (€20,000, 2025). For mixed reality immersive installation exploring ecological and technological entanglement.
- MANE Emerging Composer Prize**, Australia (\$2,000, 2024) – for *Pleiades*, animated notation for MANE Ensemble.
- Pro Helvetia Johannesburg, *Chimère Communities* (CHF 15,000, 2024). For Fak’ugesi installation, workshop, and talks.
- Creative Climate Awards**, NYC – nominated artist (\$200, 2023) for *Tentaculae*.
- Daphne Oram Award**, BBC Radiophonic Workshop (£500, 2021) – honouring innovation in gender-diverse music technology.
- Best Work with AI**, AiiA Festival, Geneva (£6,000, 2021) – prize for AI opera *Incheon*.

Selected Performances & Exhibitions

- Meet Music Code Festival** (Switzerland, 2026) – Interactive feminist tech practices.
- Radical Interfaces** (Drake Music DMLab, 2025) – Disabled-led AI instrument building.
- Julius Eastman: Femenine** (Royal Northern Sinfonia, Newcastle, 2025) – Performance.
- Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival** (UK, 2018, 2024–25) – World premieres of *Investigation* by Cristian Marclay, workshops with interactive AI, *Marlaut* (an hcmf// and Perempuan Komponis commission), and the piano solo *When I Grow Up to Be the Apocalypse* by Maria Sappho.
- Mogwai International Tour** (USA, EU, AUS/NZ, 2024) – Keyboardist for SXSW, Mona FOMA, and numerous EU festivals.
- Fak’ugesi Festival** (South Africa, 2024) – Presented *Zemi* textile rug and Sapphnetic Mirror gesture system.
- Birth Parents Project** (NHS Grampian, Scottish Parliament, 2024) – Arts-policy research on social care.
- AI and Diverse Abilities** (Lucy Hale Festival, 2024) – Workshop series.

UNESCO Week of Sound (Paris, 2023) – Presented *Ostoyae* (fungal/AI instrument) and ecological workshop.

AiiA Festival (Switzerland, 2021 & 2022) – Premiere of AI opera *Incheon*; development of Mycomusic instruments and installations.

BBC Radio 3 (2019–25) – Featured on *New Music Show*, *Late Junction*, and *Freeness*.

Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra (Glasgow, 2016–) – Long-term member of GIO, performing with George Lewis, International Contemporary Ensemble, Instant Composers Pool, Douglas Ewart, Mariam Rezei, Maggie Nicols, and many more. Performances locally at GIOfest, Tectonics, Glasgow Jazz Festival, and internationally with the Australian Art Orchestra.

Creative Music Intensive (MONA & Arts Centre Melbourne, 2018) – With Australian Art Orchestra and Yolngu-song tradition.

Selected Advocacy & Curatorial Work

Co-founder, **Chimère Communities** (2023–) – building feminist AI + community art hubs across the UK, South Africa, Lesotho, and Switzerland.

Curator, **Mopomoso Series** & The Matriarchal March (2020–present) – monthly concert series at London’s Vortex Jazz Bar, spotlighting gender-diverse improvisers.

Curator, **VIR** (2024) – International gender-diverse composer concert including collaboration with Maria Chavez, and world premieres from gender-diverse composers from Iran, Japan, Switzerland, Zambia, and Itlay.

Artistic Consultant, **Falkirk Council £140m Growth Deal** (2023) – advised on sustainable art and inclusive cultural infrastructure.

Committee Member, **Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra** (2016–present) – programming, advocacy, and EDI leadership.

Selected press and media coverage

2023. Jankowska, L. ‘Re-thinking Virtuosity for the Hybrid Era of Multifarious Approaches.’ *Contemporary Music Review*: Highlights Sappho’s contributions to redefining virtuosity through composition with AI.

2023. MacGlone, U. “Of Music, Mushrooms, and Machines: The Ostoyae, Chimère, and You.” *The Wire Magazine*: Explores Sappho’s integration of AI and ecology in the project *The Ostoyae*.

2023. Shoemaker, B. *Music Farther Outside: Experimental Music During Brexit and the Pandemic*. Equinox Publishing: Features interviews and analysis of Sappho and the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra.

2021. Léman Bleu TV. “AiiA, un opéra créé par une intelligence artificielle.” [Television broadcast, Switzerland]: Coverage of Sappho’s AI-integrated opera, *Incheon*.

Education

PhD, University of Huddersfield (2023) – ERC-funded IRiMaS project

MMus (Piano Performance), Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2018)

BMus (Hons, First Class), Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (2016)

REFERENCES

Prof. Raymond MacDonald, Chair of Music Psychology and Improvisation, University of Edinburgh,
Raymond.MacDonald@ed.ac.uk

Prof. Tia DeNora, Social and Political Sciences, Philosophy, and Anthropology, Exeter University/ University of Bergen, T.DeNora@exeter.ac.uk

Dr. Scott McLaughlin, Associate Professor in Composition and Music Technology, University of Leeds,
S.McLaughlin@leeds.ac.uk