

## Music: the subtle persuader—Trax blazes new trail during 2020

Picking the right presidential candidate can be tricky in the best of times. Just in time for early voting this month, however, comes something everyone can get behind: music.

Georgia College's updated and improved Trax on the Trail website is a serious study of the science of music and political strategy. Songs on the campaign trail often evoke nostalgia, even lightheartedness. They boost a candidate or poke fun, halt indecisiveness and influence voters.

Music can also bring people together during a divisive period in history.

"The work we do at Trax is really important in the sense it combines something that people are often hesitant to talk about, like politics, with something everyone has an opinion about, which is music," said Haley Strassburger, a senior music education major from Atlanta and research assistant at Trax.

"By focusing on music candidates use and how it impacts the political soundscape, we're able to simplify the complexity of politics and make it more approachable," she said.

Since its inception in 2015, Trax on the Trail has been used by journalists nationwide and become an educational tool in classrooms. During the 2016 presidential election, the website got more than 5,000 unique visits per month.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, people are curious about ways music is used for political gain. So much happens between a candidate's campaign launch and election day. Trax is a "central hub" where scholars and the public can discuss evolving soundscapes and ways songs are employed, said Trax Founder and Assistant Professor of music, Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak.

The Trax database catalogues more than 8,000 songs from the 2016 and 2020 campaign trails. There are podcast interviews with music and political experts, as well. The bipartisan team of musicologists, political scientists, educators and Georgia College students are constantly updating information.

Trax's new design features mapping and timeline functions that provide faster, more-fluid engagement with data. The site delivers up-to-the-minute coverage and essays on relevant topics. One by E. Douglas Bomberger delves into "unsettled times" much like our own. Events preceding the 1920 election "parallel closely" to 2020 with "a global pandemic, an increase in racial and ethnic injustice" and a president who contracted the Spanish flu virus.



Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak

Like then, songs still pique the interest of marginalized voters and reveal strategic shifts in campaigns. Melodies have been known to soothe tension. Slow tempos produce a calming effect. Patriotic songs prompt optimism. Lively beats encourage action.

Since the early days of campaigns, toe-tapping tunes have been associated with presidential

candidates. Examples include "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," "Lincoln and Liberty," "Get on the Raft with Taft," "Keep Cool and Keep Coolidge," "Row, Row, Row With Roosevelt" and "I like Ike." Modern candidates like Lyndon B. Johnson, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter sustained the trend.

President Donald Trump continues his use of country songs that helped propel him to victory in 2016. Like Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s—Trump uses Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." Former Vice President Joe Biden leans heavily on music President Barack Obama used—rhythm and blues from the 1960s and '70s. During the recent Democratic National Convention, Biden repeatedly used "My City in Ruins" from Bruce Springsteen's "Rise Up" album.

"People come to our site because they find themselves entertained, annoyed or intrigued by music they hear on the trail," said Gorzelany-Mostak. "But we hope, as they read our essays and listen to our podcasts, the takeaway will be something more."

"Musical sounds communicate ideas and values, even in the absence of lyrics," Gorzelany-Mostak said. "We feel it is of vital importance for the public to develop a critical ear and become attuned to the ways political candidates can harness sound as a tool of persuasion."

COVID has complicated the situation. Songs are still broadcast in commercials, on Twitter and YouTube. But live music performances and fundraising concerts are missing. Presidential candidates are holding fewer campaign rallies, if any at all.

This has forced candidates to adopt different musical tactics, Gorzelany-Mostak said.

Senior music education major Sarah Griffin of Warthen, Georgia, documents these cultural shifts. Griffin said she's "surprised by the sheer quantities of data we're finding." Since last fall, internet traffic on the presidential election has doubled. About 150 different songs and music clips were used at the Democrat convention alone.

"On a societal level," Griffin said, "the work we do at Trax is important because there are very few, if any, online research projects that explore the relationship between music and politics."

Griffin and Strassburger helped design the new website. As research assistants, they maintain the Trax database and log music used by political candidates. This involves spreadsheets that detail the performer, song, event and context. Students conduct interviews with composers, musicians and writers about the current political climate. They post on social media, organize workshops for educators and create promotional materials.

Trax has moved them beyond playing instruments in their major to understanding why certain songs are chosen and what music reveals about campaigns. Their work reinforces the importance of being open-minded and critically analyzing what they read and observe.

The students say they've become more inquisitive, politically-aware and engaged through Trax.

"It's incredibly important for us, as consumers," Strassburger said, "to recognize the relationship between music videos, news, social media and socially-charged events like elections and politics."

For more information, visit [traxonthetrail.com](http://traxonthetrail.com).



Senior music education majors Haley Strassburger and Sarah Griffin talk with Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak. Strassburger and Griffin are research assistants at Trax.

## Board of Regents approves naming of the John E. Sallstrom Honors College

The Board of Regents approved the naming of the John E. Sallstrom Honors College at a meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 13. Sallstrom was the founder of the Honors Program at Georgia College and a staunch supporter of giving high-caliber students unique learning opportunities.

"The namesake of our Honors College is Dr. John Sallstrom, whom I've had a long-lasting professional relationship," said Dr. Ken Saladin, who recently gifted \$1 million to embark the Honors Program off on its new mission as a designated college within the university. "He began here seven years before me and came to Georgia College as chair of the religion and philosophy department."

Sallstrom heavily encouraged students to explore leadership and innovation throughout their studies at Georgia College. In 1973, he helped students initiate the Honors Student Association, later renamed Eta Sigma Alpha. In 1996, he established the Honors and Scholars Endowment Fund to provide additional long-term financial support for the program.

"I think Dr. Sallstrom's biggest contribution to honors at Georgia College was being a visionary," said Saladin. "He conceived of the idea that we should have an honors program even when we were a small, local college. He wanted to do something special for high-caliber students and give them special learning opportunities."

The honors program has had three directors: Dr. John Sallstrom, Dr. Doris Moody and Dr. Steven Elliot-Gower. Dr. Brian Newsome was selected as the Honors College inaugural dean this year, and he will spearhead its future



From left to right: Honors College Dean Brian Newsome, GC President Steve Dorman, Provost Costas Spirou and Professor Emeritus Ken Saladin cut the ribbon in front of the Humber-White House.

as the fifth official college at the university.

"It's about raising the profile of honors at Georgia College," Newsome said. "An Honors College means having the resources for transformative experiences. When I interviewed here, I found a deep appreciation for that type of honors community, and that appealed to me."

As part of the overhaul of honors at the university, the Humber-White House

has been renovated into "a vibrant hub" for honors activities. Space includes a kitchen for food receptions, lounge and study areas and the Doris C. Moody Seminar Room for "dynamic conversations."

"The honors program and now, the Honors College, is the crown jewel of Georgia College," Saladin said. "It epitomizes what it means to teach students how to think—not what to think but how to think analytically, collaboratively and across disciplines."

To commemorate 50 years of honors at Georgia College, and to mark the opening of the new John E. Sallstrom Honors College, Georgia College will host a Zoom-based celebration during Alumni Week, Nov. 5 at 6:30 p.m. The celebration will feature a short film of the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Humber-White House, comments by President Steven Dorman and Provost Costas Spirou, a history of the honors program and reflections on the path that lies before the new Honors College. It will also have a directors' panel featuring each of the previous Honors Directors: Dr. John Sallstrom, Dr. Doris Moody and Dr. Steve Elliott-Gower. The evening concludes with a 360-degree video tour of the Humber-White House.

## Children's Show 'Lions in Illyria'

The Georgia College theatre and dance department proudly presents the children's play "Lions in Illyria" by Robert Kaulzaric and directed by Julia Ann Willingham on Oct. 20 and 21 at 5 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Tickets are free at [gcgivingvoice.com](http://gcgivingvoice.com), and you can also livestream from that site. This one-hour play in fantastical animal masks will stream from the Campus Black Box Theatre.

Based on the Shakespeare play "Twelfth Night," lioness Viola loses her brother in a storm at sea and she comes upon aardvarks, peacocks and other strange animals.

The play will be enjoyed by children and adults alike. Call 478-445-4226 for more information.

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The Children's Show

# LIONS IN ILLYRIA

Written by Robert Kaulzaric

Directed by Julia Ann Willingham

Oct. 20 and 21, 2020

5 p.m. and 7 p.m.

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<https://gcgivingvoice.com/>

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## Did you know?

Dr. Dee Sams, professor of marketing, was honored with the 2020 Georgia WebMBA Outstanding Faculty of the Year Award for WebMBA Cohort 80.

Recipients of this award are selected by students in each WebMBA cohort at the end of their program.

Sams has taught in the WebMBA program since 2010 and has served as the lead professor for WMBA 6030 - Global and International Business since 2014.