



Dr. Monica Ambalal is a Professor of Music at Merritt College, where she has been a full-time faculty member since 2015. An ethnomusicologist, her teaching and scholarship explore the relationships among music history, migration, and identity. At Merritt, she regularly teaches **MUSIC 9: World Music, MUSIC 10: Music Appreciation, MUSIC 11: African American Music, and MUSIC 15A: Jazz, Blues, and Popular Music in America**. Her courses encourage students to listen critically while examining music within its broader historical and cultural contexts.

A native of Stockton, California, Dr. Ambalal began her college education at San Joaquin Delta College before transferring and continuing her studies in music. She earned a B.A. from the University of New Orleans, an M.A. in Musicology from California State University, Long Beach, an M.A. in Ethnomusicology from the University of California, Davis, and a Ph.D. in Cross-Cultural Musicology from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her research draws on ethnographic methods, including participant observation, interviews, oral histories, archival research, and musical analysis. This approach considers music not simply as sound or repertoire, but as a cultural practice and acknowledges oral tradition and the human experience as a living archive.

Her dissertation, *The History and Sustainability of the Piano Accordion by Italian Immigrant Communities in the San Francisco Bay Area*, examines how musical traditions are created, maintained, adapted, and transmitted across generations. Through ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, interviews with musicians and community members, and historical research, her work documents the accordion not only as a musical instrument but also as a vehicle for cultural memory, ethnic identity, community formation, and intergenerational connection.

Her broader scholarship examines music through the lenses of transnationalism, hybridity, migration, ethnicity, and identity, with particular interests in twentieth-century popular music and immigrant musical communities. Her research has explored Afro-Cuban mambo in 1950s New York, Indian and Arab influences in American popular music, exotica, surf music, and various Italian American musical traditions.

Dr. Ambalal has published and presented research on a wide range of topics in musicology and ethnomusicology, including migration and musical identity, Italian American musical communities, Afro-Cuban music, popular music, and sampling. Her work has been presented at scholarly meetings including the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) and the American Musicological Society (AMS). Among her earlier research is “The Commercialization of Mambo in Post-War America,” which examined the transformation and commercialization of Cuban mambo during the American mambo craze of the 1950s. Her more recent scholarship includes the published article “Hearing St. Peter’s Basilica in the Kitchen: Vatican Media Livestream of Holy Week 2020 in the Wake of COVID-19,” as well as research on the history of the Stockton Symphony, classical music sampling in hip-hop and popular culture, and Italian American music. Her work on Italian American musical culture received a 2022 conference travel award from the Italian American Studies Association and ultimately developed into her doctoral

research on the piano accordion and Italian immigrant communities of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Before joining Merritt College, Dr. Ambalal taught at San Joaquin Delta College, Sacramento City College, Solano Community College, and the University of California, Davis. In addition to her academic work, she is a proud conservatory graduate who dedicated time to study piano, cello, voice - and more recently, accordion with her beloved instructor Lou Jacklich. Her experience as both a musician and ethnomusicologist informs her approach to teaching. She strives to bring together Western and non-Western perspectives, engage with the cultural diversity of Merritt College and the Bay Area, and help students understand that studying music also means studying the people, communities, recipes, and languages that are an integral part of musicking.