**Research Grant – Spring 2009**

**Title or Proposal:** The Music of John Mayer: A Fusion of Indian with Western Elements

**Faculty member:** John Robison

**Unit:** School of Music

**Abstract:**
These funds will be used to cover air travel, lodging and registration fees for the upcoming international conference of the College Music Society, which will be held in the Croatian cities of Zagreb, Split and Dubrovnik. With this faculty member’s activities in the CMS increasing, and as a member of the program committee for the conference, it is particularly important to attend this international event. The applicant will be reading a paper on Indian composer John Mayer, the topic of a recently contracted book with the CMS.

**Proposal:**
The purpose of this proposal will be to participate in this CMS international conference as both a presenter and as one of the conference organizers. Two paper proposals were submitted for this conference, one on Korean woman composer Lim June-Hee and the other one on Indian composer John Mayer (1930-2004). Amongst an unusually large pool of conference proposals with only a 20% acceptance rate, both proposals (using the usual blind review process) received high ratings and were accepted for the conference, but the CMS rules limit activities to one presentation per person for this event. The paper on John Mayer was chosen partially because Lim June-Hee indicated that she would not be able to supply much-needed information by Spring 2009, and also because John Mayer is the subject of one of the applicant’s currently contracted books with the CMS.

Born into extreme poverty in the slums of Calcutta, John Mayer eventually rose beyond his impoverished beginnings to become one of the most innovative intercultural composers of the late twentieth century. Amongst the people who had a role in his development as a musician and as a composer were north Indian classical musical specialist Sanathan Mukerjee, well-known conductor-violinist Mehli Mehta, and Hungarian composer Matyas Seiber. Arriving in London in 1952 on a scholarship to study violin at the Royal Academy of
Music, Mayer soon began playing violin professionally, primarily with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In spite of being told repeatedly that he could never be a composer because “Indians only know how to improvise,” Mayer began in the 1950s to develop his own unique style of writing, one that successfully integrated modern Western techniques such as serialism with Indian raga, talas, and musical instruments.

This paper discusses some of Mayer’s most innovative compositions, including the ones that he composed for his highly acclaimed Indo-Jazz Fusions ensembles. Works commissioned by his professional friends in England (James Galway, Erich Gruenberg, Rohan de Saram) will be analyzed, demonstrating Mayer’s uncanny ability to use traditional Indian melodic and rhythmic concepts within a contemporary framework. Since much of the applicant’s previous work on Mayer was done in the late 1990s, and before the composer’s unexpected accidental death in March 2004, this paper provides a new perspective on Mayer, one that takes into account his entire compositional output and development.

In June 2008, the CMS national officers asked this faculty member to be on the ten-person program committee for their conference in Croatia. While the paper presentation described above is the most significant part of this proposal, membership on the organizing committee for an international CMS conference is quite an honor, and it is important to attend the conference for this reason. The applicant hopes to be selected for such program committees in the future, and believes that active participation in the Croatia international conference will be a way of becoming more well-established within the CMS organization. It is anticipated that interactions with European scholars and performers will also lead to more international opportunities in the future.