

Music 114: **Music of the Twentieth Century**

Winter Quarter 2017

Tuesdays and Wednesdays 12:30 - 1:50 / CPMC 136

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office hours: Wednesdays 2 - 5 and by appointment / Warren Music Building 2147

Readers:

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[General Catalog Course Description: "An exploration of materials and methods used in the music of our time. There will be an extra discussion group for music majors. May be repeated once for credit.

Prerequisites: none."]

Objectives

- To become familiar and conversant with a representative body of 20th-century musical compositions
- To be able to listen attentively to unfamiliar music, and write incisively about it
- To understand how music functions as a form of human enquiry

Course Overview

In this course we will work through a select number of musical compositions from diverse decades of the Twentieth Century. I choose works which demonstrate distinctive musical strategies, particular materials, and striking applications of those materials, thus setting up listening experiences that provoke our consciousness of the listening experience. I do not aspire to an exhaustive treatment of the century, neither chronologically nor stylistically. I prefer to share a compact body of work and discuss it in detail, rather than fly through too many names, dates and titles for anyone to remember. For the most part, the works I choose fall under the general rubric of "classical music," as questionable as that descriptor may be; but when relevant, other forms of music-making besides notated works intended for concert hall performance will make appearances. There are no reading assignments, but regular (and substantial) listening assignments about which you will write weekly. In essence, this course can be thought of as an exploration of the many ways in which we perceive, absorb and react to music, carried out against select musical examples from the Twentieth Century.

Assignments

- Weekly listening assignments will be posted on the class website.
- Written responses to the listening assignments will be due every Monday by midnight (uploaded to the class website). These must be between 600-800 words, and must address specific prompts that I will post for each listening.

Course Website: tritoned.ucsd.edu

Announcements, assignments and listenings will be posted to the TritonEd site for this course; your completed writings will likewise be submitted electronically through the site.

Midterm and Final

- The midterm will be in class on Tuesday, February 7.
- The final is scheduled for Tuesday, March 21 at 11:30am, location TBD.
- Both midterm and final will consist of selections of music *not covered* in the lectures, and unfamiliar to you, which you will write about in some depth.

Grading

- 60%: written responses to listening assignments
- 15%: midterm
- 25%: final

Academic Integrity: Under UCSD's integrity policy, the instructor of record may fail any student for any documented case of cheating or plagiarism, and I will in fact do so. There is no reason to cheat in this course, and I value honesty and sincerity of expression over intellectual fireworks or style points. You are encouraged to discuss your work with your classmates, and to show each other your work, but what you turn in must represent your own thoughts expressed in your own words, however modest. Information on the UCSD policy can be found here:

<http://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/>

Please communicate with your T.A. or with me if you are uncertain of the line between original work and plagiarism; and if you are very interested in academic integrity, I recommend this Princeton University site:

<http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/pages/intro/index.htm>

Late assignments will not be accepted, unless due to demonstrable, extraordinary hardship; **extra credit** is not offered.

Gadgets: please do not use smartphones, cellphones or hand-held devices during the lectures. You may use laptops for note-taking only.

A music that questions

"Questions generate life, answers death." (Michel Khleifi)

I'm interested in the ways in which music continues to redefine itself. Music is a reflection of social behaviors and cultural environments, as indeed all art forms are; but at the same time music is a social activity that invents or instigates cultural beliefs and ideas. I don't mean that it does this through texts such as song lyrics or opera libretti, but through the very structure of music, its uses and potential uses, its performed incarnations, its means of diffusion. There are numerous historical instances of musical practices informing social consciousness, from monastic music-making in the middle ages to the chamber music of salons in nineteenth century Europe to punk rock in the 1970's.

Most often, music shapes human thought and behavior subtly and mysteriously, channeling ways of perceiving the world around us. Sometimes music invents models of awareness; the music of Alvin Lucier, by training our focus on the actual acoustics of existing rooms, leaves us hyperaware of resonance long after the piece itself ends. Sometimes music focuses our awareness on one another, as in the music of Cornelius Cardew or Christian Wolff, which asks us to explicitly respond to one another as co-musicians in an ongoing performance called "Life."

Music also questions itself. This is why history can be interesting. The most radical music tends to start from the premises to which it has fallen heir, and, in mastering those premises, to question them from the inside. This kind of *immanent critique* leads not so much to newness for its own sake, as to a kind of trueness-to-itself of a particular cultural or historical moment. Without this critique, a culture labors over encrusted forms to which it has lost an organic connection; it *re-enacts* old forms rather than *acting* freely and creatively through its own forms.

In the lectures I will speak about the numerous examples of 20th-century music which embrace this

questioning, enquiring faculty of music. I am not opposed to music as entertainment, with all of the wonderfully mindless pleasures we associate with that category. But it is not only that; and if we explore classical music as a set of ideas we can learn to appreciate music both for its sensuous delights and for its intellectual and spiritual challenges. I hope you will join in the spirit of enquiry by raising your own questions about the questions that music raises. If music can redefine itself, then in doing so it calls on us to reflect upon the ways we define music.

I emphasize writing in this course. It is hard to write about music, and to learn to do so, even as non-experts, and even about music that is unfamiliar or alien to us, is a valuable skill, broadening our faculties of responsiveness to the world and attentiveness to the unfamiliar and different. Writing is a way of thinking through the issues with an *other*, a reader, in mind; and it takes fixed, graphic and aesthetic forms that often surprise us. The surprises are useful and revealing. I encourage you to approach writing as a process of discovery, the way in previous eras - before photography - a traveler might have sketched a sight she wished to remember; or the way one works out a puzzle or an equation on paper: to see what happens. When writing your listening responses, try to fix the music in a written statement that would convey to a friend the most important things you have noticed, in the greatest possible detail.

"Writing is a concentrated form of thinking. I don't know what I think about certain subjects, even today, until I sit down and try to write about them." (Don DeLillo)

I will enforce two prohibitions in your writing assignments. First, don't write a music review; try to suspend judgment. *I am not asking for your opinion on this music!* Treat the music as an anthropologist might, with curiosity and openness, not involuntarily filtering the music through your own expectations or habits. Leave your opinions and preferences, likes and dislikes, elsewhere. It's not that you're not entitled to them, of course you are. But the discipline of focussing on a musical work, whether you like it or not, and describing it, detailing its constituent parts, speculating on the ideas or impulses driving it, is enormously liberating. Second, do not compile facts gleaned from the internet or elsewhere. Facts, dates, sheer information surrounding the works I assign to you are irrelevant in this class. *Your grade will be marked down if you provide filler information not requested in the writing prompt.* The writing assignments are not research assignments; they are accounts of your observations, emerging from your listening efforts, as answers to the questions I pose, and drawn exclusively from the act of listening and the act of thinking and writing.

Ancient texts describe those who listened to the music of the mythical Orpheus as listening "with straining ears." The rapt attention and active involvement invoked by the words "straining ears" can stand as a touchstone for the quality of listening we will aspire to.