expressive culture: sounds
v55.0703
lecture T/TH 11:00-12:15, Rm. 714 Main
Professor Gage Averill
Preceptors:

GOALS: EXPRESSIVE CULTURE: SOUNDS challenges conventional notions of the importance, function, and meaning of sound, music, noise, and silence in human life. We explore:

- the science of sounds (acoustics);
- hearing or auditory perception/sensation;
- soundscapes and relationships of music to natural and man-made sounds;
- the social and cultural foundations of music;
- the functions of music;
- the relationship of music to spirituality, power, memory, and identity.
- mediated music, film music, and music in advertising

Our primary goal is to foster a new kind of musical “literacy” with higher standards for hearing, experiencing, analyzing and discussing music—equal to the task of navigating in a rapidly evolving soundscape of mediated and multicultural musics. The course has a strong bias toward making sense of the sound environments in which we find ourselves. We also want to:

1. Increase students’ awareness of and sensitivity to sounds and sound environments/soundscapes
2. Provide a foundation for understanding how sounds are made and perceived
3. Teach basic concepts and terminology with which to discuss sound and music
4. Underline the important role that sound and music play in human life, society and culture and how musical meaning is produced
5. Provide students with the tools to understand their own and others’ enjoyment of music
6. Highlight the diversity of human uses and approaches to sound and music
7. Foster a critical awareness of the use of sound in commercial media and mediated environments

The course comprises a series of modules. The first module covers basic concepts; a second module explores how sound and music are important in human life; the third tackles twentieth century innovations in music composition and reception; and finally we focus on music in film and related media. Examples
are selected from a wide range of historical periods and different musical cultures to encourage you to think about sound and musical expression across boundaries of time, space, culture, and academic disciplines.

Policies
ATTENDANCE: Attendance at all lectures and preceptorial sections is mandatory. Students should check in with their preceptor before the start or after the end of lecture. More than three recorded absences at the lectures OR labs (without a note from a Dean or doctor) will result in a loss of a full grade for the course. Each additional absence will do the same. Please plan to be in class on time and to spend the entire session. Late arrivals or early departures may be counted as absences. Also, TURN OFF ALL CELLULAR PHONES AND BEEPERS.

WEB PAGES: The course web pages contain a calendar, course information, contact information for the professor and preceptors, announcements, student grades, assignments, sound files, study guides, and bulletin boards for communications. A general course informational bulletin board will be set up for general questions of interest to the entire class. Please set your announcements feature to read the announcements for the last seven days. Assignments will be posted for the following class NO LATER than the preceeding class period, so check the site often.

ASSIGNMENTS: Written assignments, listening assignments, and reading assignments must be completed by the class (or preceptorial session) on the date they appear as “due” in the syllabus. Written assignments will be marked down by a full grade (for ex. A to B+) for each class session they are overdue.

PRECEPTORIAL SESSIONS: Preceptorials will emphasize student participation and discussion, which are difficult to facilitate in the large lectures. Assignments handed in at preceptorial sessions will be graded from 1-100. The preceptorial section of class will be devoted to creating a common language and conceptual framework for elements of musical sound and to building listening skills that students can use throughout their lives. The lab sequence (as well as some lecture topics) will be linked to the video series “Exploring a World of Music” (Annenberg/CPB). In addition to the assignments given in class and on this syllabus, preceptors will assign short written assignments.

VIDEO SERIES: The Anneberg/CPB series “Exploring a World of Music” is central to the content of the lectures and the preceptorial sessions. You will be responsible for video content, especially the basic ideas and main examples in each, SO take notes and keep an account of the videos you see. The video material is reinforced in classroom lectures and preceptorial sections.

GRADING: Examinations and papers will be graded on a 100-point basis. Two non-cumulative exams — a midterm and a final— will utilize a variety of question
types (e.g. short answer, multiple choice, and listening questions) and will test mastery of basic concepts, terms, and listening skills. Each accounts for 25% of your grade. The final is NOT cumulative. Papers are intended to emphasize writing, descriptive, critical, analytic and rhetorical skills. Papers will be assigned by the preceptors in consultation with the professor. Preceptors will announce how these will be weighed, but the preceptorial section will account for 50% of your final grade. Credible evidence of plagiarism or cheating in examinations or papers will be reported to the Dean of the College and will result in a failing grade for the course. This is not subject to after-the-fact negotiation. Note: No incompletes can be given for the course.

Course Outline
MAP — EXPRESSIVE CULTURE: SOUNDS
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MODULE I. SOUND FOUNDATIONS
What is sound, how do we perceive it, and how do we relate to sound, noise, and silence?
Class Date Topic
1. Introduction. The power of sound.
2. Silence / Noise
3. The physics of sound
4. Hearing
5. The biophony (Animal sound) 1
6. The biophony (Animal sound) 2

MODULE II. SOUNDLY ORGANIZED HUMANITY
Something like music plays a role in every human society--our relationship to sound helps to form us as human beings. It accompanies us in all of our momentous passages from childhood lullabies to wedding music to death laments. It structures our religious rituals and serves as a communicative medium with the spiritual realm. It helps to form our most important memories and to create our sense of individual and collective identity.
Class Date Topic
7. Soundscapes 1
8. Soundscapes 2: Case Studies
9. Music & movement
10. Music & memory
11. Music, ritual, & religion
12. Ritual, worldbeat, and globalization.
13. In-class performance: Ronnie Nogetsu Reishin Seldin, shakuhachi

14. MIDTERM EXAMINATION

MODULE III: SOUNDPLAY: THE ART OF NOISE
The 20th century has unleashed an unprecedented assault on previous conceptions of music — an assault that has sought to expand our experience of sound and out tolerance for dissonance and noise. This module is an introduction to some of the movements that have brought new sounds to the West, including: futurism, improvisatory jazz, ambient music, minimalism, performance art, "world music", conceptual art and electronic music.

Class Date Topic
15. The role of noise in 20th century art and popular music
16. Futurism, the Theremin
17. Sounds "Modern": Debussy, Stravinsky, Ives and others
18. Experimental instruments, sounds, & voices
19. Serialism, aleatory music, and minimalism
20. avant garde/experimental/free jazz techniques and composers
21. Sampling and synthesizing: Musique concrète, synthesis, turntablism, sampling

MODULE IV. TRACKS: SOUND IN FILM (& RELATED MEDIA)
Our musicscapes are increasingly supplied by commercial culture industries and channeled through electronic media (radio, television, cinema, CDs, video games, the World Wide Web) for profit. An average Westerner spends much of his or her waking life consuming — intentionally or not — these products of commercial culture. It is thus more important than ever to be aware of the logic of sound in the media, especially because sound is designed to be most effective below the level of conscious perception. This module uses "Hollywood" film soundtracks and scores as the means to investigate these processes and relations, but we'll also extend our analysis to advertising and to television.

Class Topic
22. “The American Movie Score” (film)
23. Introduction to the history of film sound: from silent to talkie films, the “golden era”
24 Soundtracks / filmsound / filmscore analysis
25. The Dark Side of Oz: Audio-visual junctures and disjunctures
26. Pop song soundtracks, compilation films & classical music tracks
27. Advertising and the logic of commercial sound: Jingles and background sound. Infotainment: The film and entertainment industries

TBA Final Examination