New York University
A private university in the public service

Faculty of Arts and Science
Department of Music
24 Waverly Place, Room 268
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Prof. Michael Beckerman
Expressive Culture: Sounds
Room 320, MW 12-1:15
Preceptors: Brett Pyper, Thomas Brett

The purpose of this course is to provide a broad introduction to music. The course will be divided into four units. The first unit will focus on some of the things that music does and try to distinguish it from other arts and types of communication. We will explore the paradox of music as something that is simultaneously of this world, and apart from it. During this time we will attend a performance of an opera at the Metropolitan Opera: Leos Janacek’s Jenufa. Part of the first unit will prepare us for the experience.

Although recorded music is a staple of our culture, performed music offers an opportunity to explore different aspects of sound production and its meaning. For our second unit the entire class will learn to play the pennywhistle for about three weeks, allowing us to explore questions of expression, interpretation, preparation and performance.

In his book Fast Food Nation Eric Schlosser describes the many ways in which fast food has altered American culture, from the physical to the metaphysical. Our third unit will be a debate on a single premise: Is pop music like fast food? Students will be divided up into discussion groups and asked to present various viewpoints on the subject. This will culminate in a Great Debate.

Although we can never precisely define music there is no doubt about its power move us deeply. The fourth unit of the course turns to film and the study of scenes from such movies as Amadeus, Gadjo dilo, and Shawshank Redemption that try to portray this this power in order to ask questions about the broad relationship between music and human beings.

Requirements:

1. Classroom attendance and attendance at recitation.
2. One introductory non-graded paper and then one 3-5 page paper tied to each of the first three course units.
3. One final project to be determined in discussion with preceptors and professor.
4. Preceptor assignments.
5. I will meet individually with all the students two thirds through the course to review student performance and discuss a final project.
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Brief Syllabus

Texts: There is no textbook for the course. Various reading will be assigned, but most of the outside work will involve listening to music and writing essays. A longer, more detailed syllabus will be available next week. Eric Schlosser’s Fast Food Nation will be required reading, and it would be a good idea to pick up a copy of Janacek’s opera Jenůfa which we will be attending as a class.

Jan. 22    Course Introduction: Music of Cold
Jan. 27    On musical form: simple patterns (Ungraded assignment due)
Jan. 29    On musical form: extensions
Feb. 3     On musical form: long forms
Feb. 5     Opera: history, shape, and cultural significance
Feb. 10    Janacek’s Jenůfa: Speech melodies and folk music
Feb. 12    Jenůfa: Creating dramatic intensity
Feb. 13    *Jenůfa performance at Metropolitan Opera, 8 P.M.
Feb. 17    No School
Feb. 19    Playing the Pennywhistle (Assignment 2 Due)
Feb. 24    Practicing an instrument
Feb. 26    Different pennywhistle traditions
Mar. 3     Expression
Mar. 5    Interpretation
Mar. 10   Lessons
Mar. 12   Pennywhistle recitals (Either whistle recital or an essay due)
Mar. 17 Spring Recess
Mar. 19   Spring Recess
Mar. 24   The Great Debate opens: Is Fast Food like Pop Music?
Mar 26    *Fast Food Nation*: Lecture/discussion w Eric Schlosser
Mar. 31   The demographics of pop music
Apr.  2   Marketing pop music
Apr.  7   Marketing of musical culture in general
Apr.  9   Final Discussion and Debate (Assignment 4 due)
Apr 14    Films about music: Opening lecture
Apr. 16   *Amadeus* and *Immortal Beloved*
Apr. 21   *Shine* and *Sunshine*
Apr. 23   *Shawshank Redemption* and *Fifth Planet*
Apr. 28   *Solaris*
Apr. 30   Some New Film Not Yet Released
May  5    **Final Paper Due**: Final discussion
Prof. Michael Beckerman  
Expressive Culture: Sounds  
Room 320, MW 12:15  
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A Trip to the Opera

On February 13th at 8 P.M. we shall see Leos Janacek’s opera Jenufa at the Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center. The week before this we shall be studying the opera in some detail, and study materials will be distributed.

Procedure for getting tickets: In case you hadn’t noticed, it’s a class society we live in, and this is nowhere so obvious as at the opera. Tickets are very expensive—except for student tickets which may be purchased ahead of time at the box office by presenting a student ID. Each ID entitles the bearer to purchase two tickets. While I will not coordinate the purchases, please consider appointing various students to get multiple tickets so that some of you can avoid the trek. On the other hand, please feel free to bring someone to the opera, and note that it is the day before Valentine’s Day (I will come to the wedding or comparable ceremony of anyone who falls in love with a future partner during the opera...). SO, go to the box office between now and February 13th and buy a ticket for Leos Janacek’s Jenufa. It costs $25, about a sixth of its normal price. Ain’t it great to be a student!

But wait, you say, I’ve got a backpacking trip to the moon that weekend OR I’m going back home because it’s a long weekend. What shall I do? Never fear, there are also performances of the opera on February 3rd and 7th that you may attend in lieu of the performance on the 13th.

I would strongly suggest that you pick up your tickets as soon as possible, since the earlier you come, the better the seats. Plan to arrive for the opera at 7:30 or so to take in the ambience, etc. etc.

Thanks to the beneficence of NYU, there will be a reception following the opera in a place to be determined. I hope that we will have some people from the opera to talk to you about the production.
Assignment 1 (ungraded)

Choose *any sound you like* and try to describe it in detail. It may be the sound of the R train coming into the station or a car alarm. It may be your favorite CD or a friend's voice. As you are choosing your sound and considering the problem, think about what means we use to describe sound and how well or poorly language deals with sound phenomenon.

Write a 1-2 page essay which will be **due next week**. Please hand these in to your preceptors during your first meeting next week.

Your essay should be typed and double-spaced to allow for comments. It should reflect an imaginative and original formulation. I am a *less is more* person when it comes to writing. Never add words to pad an assignment. And remember: *writing is all there is of you when you are not there.* It is "you," minus speech intonation, hand gesture, facial movement, body language, etc. That is a lot of minus, and that is one reason why your writing must be so rich.

The purpose of this assignment is for us to get to know each other. The sooner this happens, the better for all concerned. This assignment will not be graded, but you will get an idea from our response about where you stand and what, if anything, needs to be done in terms of writing.