Expressive Culture: Sound MAP V55.0730.011
T Th, 11-12:15, 320 Main (sections in 318 Main)

Principal Instructor: Suzanne G. Cusick, susanne.cusick@nyu.edu, 24 Waverly Pl, Rm. 266B;W, 2-4 and by appointment.
Preceptors: Monica Hairston, mlh248@nyu.edu, V55.0730.012 (T, 8-9:15) and .014 (F, 9:20-10:45); and Wynn Yamami, wy218@nyu.edu, V55.0730.013 (M, 12:30-1:45) and .015 (M, 2-3:15); office hours by appt.

What’s the point of this course?

What’s the use of music? How do people makesense of the so-called “musical” sounds available to them in a given time and place? How does music get to be meaningful to people in a given time and place, useful as they live their lives?

I want to teach you some ways to answer these questions. Beginning from my conviction that is not a bunch of CDs we can buy in Tower Records, and not, either, something you must learn to “appreciate” in a concert as if you were learning to eat your spinach, I will argue that music is a kind of social interaction in which many people collaborate to infuse shared experiences of organized sound with multiple meanings, especially meanings that help them sustain a sense of who they are, as individuals and as members of a cultural world. We will develop our notion of how music acquires its meanings through intense engagement with several musical cultures: the world of “classical” instrumental music; the world that links opera, musical theatre, and MTV; the world of New York dance clubs in the 1980s and ’90s; and the Detroit-centered world of popular music.

Texts (all required):

Christopher Small, Musicking. The Meanings of Performing and Listening (Hanover NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998) [ISBN 081952759], $19.95
Suzanne Smith, Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) [ISBN 0 674 00063 3 $15.95

**plus frequent listening assignments in Bobst Library and/or as mp3 files on the Blackboard website for this course, viewing of three films TBA, and tinybit of reserve reading.

Requirements:

801. Attendance, participation, weekly one-page papers for section [graded P/F] 30%
802. Two quizzes or mini-papers in section, 2nd week of Feb and 1st week of April 20%
These will each be worth 10% of the course grade, and will be designed by your preceptor.
803. Midterm essay format TBA, due at class 25 March 20%
804. Final essay [take-home, due first day of exams] 30%

(see next page for the actual final exam question)
Final Exam Question
For your final exam I ask that you write a 5-8 page essay that answers the question “How does music mean?” The essay should present a coherent theory of how meanings can be constructed, deciphered, and/or experienced in the presence of musical behaviors and sounds. You should be sure to consider the various ways Kramer, Small, McClary, Fikentscher and Smith propose that one could think about musical meanings.

You should build your argument around specific musicalexamples. Choose pieces of music, genres, performance venues as you see fit to exemplify and support your points. Ideally, you'll write about a kind of music about which you care deeply, be it C&W, punk, rap, “Broadway”, electronica... whatever. You will probably find it helpful to discuss your choice(s) with your precentor, and possibly with me as well.

You should write as if your parents, grandparents, or a family friend were to read your essay as an example of what you’re learning in college. Be clear, be colloquial if you want to be, but be sure to show off the best, most careful and most imaginative level of thought you can muster. Your essay should be typed or word-processed (spell-checked and proofread), double-spaced.

Please be meticulous in acknowledging the source(s) of your ideas, and in citing them whenever possible so that I (who will read these essays) can find and ready your source myself. Sources that require acknowledgment include books, articles in books, magazines and encyclopedias, interviews, the promotional materials included with recorded media (LPs, cassettes, CDs, VHS cassettes, DVDs, mp3 files downloaded from specific websites, etc), conversations with other people (including professors, preceptors and fellow students), class notes, and material gathered from websites.

When should you cite an idea in your essay? When you don’t quite “own” the idea, even though you mean to work with it.

For example, if I were writing about the different ways people used Motown—as dance music, as make-out music, as a music that proclaimed a rising economic and political power wielded among Detroit’s African American community in the 1960s, I’d cite the book by Suzanne Smith that we’re using as a text. That’s easy. But what if I wanted to talk about the way little white girls like the one I was danced to that music in the halls of our apartment buildings, learning the latest moves while we sang along to words about sex and talked about the cute boys in our class? You’d think I could just write it as autobiographical knowledge, but if I were honest I’d have to confess that I read an article by Mary Douglas about just that sort of thing as a prelude to late 60s white-girl feminism. The best advice is ‘when in doubt, cite’ it.

I will not require you to use any particular format for citing the source of your ideas. You may, for example, simply say (Smith, Dancing..., p.123) or (conversation with Fly, 14 February 2003) or (http://www.acappella.com).

If I should discover that you used a source without citing it, I will fail you on the final. Because the final is 30% of the course grade, that would result in an otherwise perfect student getting a D....so it would be, like, so stupid to try....

I will accept no late papers, and I will give no grades of Incomplete, unless we agree after a personal meeting that your personal circumstances are truly dire.
Expressive Culture: Sound V55.0730.011.SP03
Course Outline
[Note: All sound and video materials are on reserve in the Avery Fisher Center of Bobst Library.]

Unit 1: Musical Meaning(s) (Hermeneutics and Ritual)
7 lectures and 4 sections, Jan. 21-Feb. 13

Texts:

1a) Musical meaning through hermeneutics:
for Jan 23 Schubert, Moment Musical in Ab, D.780, on XCD 7403, and Kramer, ch. 1
for Jan 28 Beethoven, “Moonlight Sonata”, on XCD 9318 and XCD 5872, and Kramer, ch. 2
for Jan 30 Schubert, “Heidenroslein”, on XCD 5961
plain and Kramer, ch. 3

1b) Is hermeneutics enough to decipher musical meanings? Beethoven’s 5th Symphony as a bedtime story
for Feb. 4 Small, p. 1-87; try to attend some kind of live concert
for Feb 6 Beethoven, Symphony no. 5, on XCD 277 and XCD 1606
for Feb. 11 rest of Small; and Beethoven’s 5th as bedtime story
for Feb. 13 breathe....discuss...process [quiz or paper crafted by your precentor in section
*a quiz in section or a mini-paper crafted by you precentor and due at section, worth 10% of course grade*

(Themes: thinking about musical meaning through hermeneutics: matters of form (melody, harmony, texture, genre in relation to context, embodiment–hands and voice-- in relation to performance), identity, communication, representation; thinking about musical meaning through ‘thick description’ of performance and listening behaviors.

The composer-performer-audience triangle; the concept of intertextuality; concept of voice; music as [performed] text vs. musicking as social process

[see next page for Unit 2]
Unit 2: Music, Drama and ‘Others’, or, Sonic Intertextualities through Carmen
9 lectures and 4 sections, Feb. 18-Mar 13

Texts:
Susan McClary, George Bizet: Carmen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Materials for Listening and Viewing:
Georges Bizet, Carmen (Maria Callas and Nicolai Gedda), XCD 16962
Georges Bizet, Carmen (Julia Migenes Johnson and Placido Domingo), VCA 470
Oscar Hammerstein, Carmen Jones (Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte) VCA 10462
Robert Townsend, Kip Collins et al, Carmen: A HipHopera, personal DVD onreserve

Themes: voices in relation to texts as doubling and redoubling intertextual density; intertextuality, ‘remakes’ and signifyin’; representations and reception of ‘the Other’; ‘opera’, Tin Pan Alley and hip hop as three stylistic vocabularies with which to construct the same conflicts; gender and representation, gender and performance, gender and reception; [high(brow) culture vs. low(brow) culture]; basic history of sung drama in the West; criticizing critics; harmony, chromatic/diatonic continuum, ostinatos, leitmotifs, shared material as musically shaping dramatic texts]

B R E A K
Midterm 20% of course grade, format TBA due Tuesday, March 25

Note: Units after break may be shuffled, depending on the Usrelease date of Callas Forever

Unit 3: On Stars and Reception Communities: Callas Forever
4 lectures and 2 sections, tentatively Mar 25-April 3

Texts:
Bizet, Carmen soundrecording starring Maria Callas

[and: David Roman, “‘It’s My Party and I’ll Die If I Want To!’ (on AIDS and performance)”, in Roman, Acts of Intervention (Bloomington, 1998), PN 2266.R66 1998],

Themes: voices as texts [again w/thedensity of musical intertextuality]; stars as texts; reception communities, esp. queer; feminist critiques of queer reception?; ‘canned’ [“fraud”] vs. authentic; sound in film.

[see next page for final two units]
Unit 4: You Better Work! Production, Reception and Identity Through Dance Club Music
4 lectures and 2 sections, tentatively April 8-April 17

Texts:
Various club mix CDs, TBA
guest lecture and demonstration by Fikentscher

Themes: reception communities policed by connoisseurship, regardless of class; marginal identities; dance as resistance [continuing from “I sing for myself” notion of Carmen]; music and technology; music/sound as pressure on bodies, musicking bodies assited/sources of memory; dance, “church”, and gospel

*2nd quiz or mini-paper here, as crafted by precursor*

Unit 5: Dancing in the Street: Sound, Song and Cultural Politics
4 lectures and 2 sections, tentatively April 22-May 1

Texts:
*Hitsville* (boxed set of 4 CDs with booklet)
Recordings of Langston Hughes reading his own poetry, MLK’s speeches

Themes: recorded speech, recorded sound, music and dance on a continuum of expressive culture; capitalist activity as musicking (producing to exchange for cash culturally meaningful musical performances, and exchanging those performances); complex narrative of history and culture as yielding rich sense of musical meaning.