Expressive Culture: Sound MAP V55.0730.001
T Th, 11-12:15, 320 Main (or Millenium Film Workshop, 66 E. 4th St bet/Bowery and 2nd Ave)

Principal Instructor: Suzanne G. Cusick, suzanne.cusick@nyu.edu, 24 Waverly Pl, Rm. 266B; Office hours Wednesday, 3-5 and by appointment.
Preceptor: Jenny Johnson, jjohnson@nyu.edu

Sections: This course will have no sections. Instead, I will ask each of you to submit one-page (200-350 word) response papers weekly to this website’s Digital Dropbox. The subjects for these papers are already listed on the syllabus; they are intended to give you an opportunity to think through certain issues that will arise in lecture, and to give you practice in writing about music so that you are well prepared to write excellent midterm and final essays.

Jenny and I will divide responsibility for reading and responding to the weekly response papers (Jenny will take responsibility for those of you once scheduled to be in Sections 002 and 005; I’ll take responsibility for those of you once scheduled to be in Sections 003 and 004.).

Response papers are to be submitted no later than noon on the Monday that ends a ‘section week’ (so, the first papers are due at noon on Monday, January 23). They should be submitted as Microsoft Word documents, so that we can make comments and return them electronically. Late papers will not be accepted without a genuinely significant reason for the delay—reasons on the order of sudden illness, a death or medical emergency in your immediate family, etc.

Jenny and I have agreed to hold regular office hours (days and times to be announced in class Tuesday, Jan 17), and to hold optional ‘review sessions’ at least once a month in the course of the term. You should expect these sessions to be scheduled during one of the Friday or Monday times originally reserved for sections, and you should therefore try to refrain from making other commitments for your originally scheduled section time.

What’s the point of this course?
What’s the use of music? How do people make sense 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 those questions. Beginning from my conviction that “music” 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. Most often, these are meanings that
help people sustain a sense of who we are, as individuals and as members of a cultural world. In this course, 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):

**plus frequent listening assignments as mp3 files on the Blackboard website for this course, viewing of four films TBA, and some supplemental readings that will be available on the course’s Blackboard site.**

Requirements:
1. Attendance, participation, weekly one-page papers. [graded P/F] 30%
2. Two ‘quizzes’ in lecture on 9 Feb and 13 April 20%
3. Midterm essay format TBA, due at class Tuesday, Mar 21 20%
4. Final essay [take-home, due first day of exams] 30%

**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 (whom you’ll read on the website), Small, McClary, Fikentscher and Smith propose that one could think about musical meanings.

You should build your argument around specific musical examples. 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 Jenny or me, perhaps quite early in the semester.

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.

When writing this essay (and when writing the midterm essay!) I expect you to 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 read 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 once 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 might 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 having led 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 November 2004) or (http://www.acappella.com).

***If I should discover that you used a source without citing it, or collaborated with a classmate without acknowledging it, I will fail you on the piece of writing in question, whether it’s the midterm or the final. Because the final is 30% of the course grade, failure to cite a source would result in an otherwise perfect student getting a D....so it would be, like, soooooo 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.
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Course Outline

[Note: All sound materials will be on this website, at Course Documents, in a folder called “Sound”. Videos will be on reserve in the Avery Fisher Center of Bobst Library.]

Unit 1: Musical Meaning(s) (Hermeneutics and Ritual) 7 lectures, Jan 19-Feb 9

Texts:
Lawrence Kramer, Musical Meaning. Toward a Critical History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), chapters 1 and 2, on website

1a) Musical meaning through hermeneutics:
for Jan 19, Schubert, Moment Musical in Ab, D. 780, on XCD 7403, and Kramer, ch. 1
for Jan 24, Beethoven, “Moonlight Sonata”, on XCD 9318 and XCD 5872, and Kramer, ch. 2
for Jan 26, Schubert, “Heidenroslein”, on XCD 5961, and bring to class several examples of voices that you think are distinctive or interesting

1b) Is hermeneutics enough to decipher musical meanings? Beethoven’s 5th symphony as a bedtime story
for Jan 31, Small, p. 1-87; try to attend some kind of live concert, and listen at least once to Beethoven, Symphony no. 5, on XCD 277 and SCD 1606
for Feb 2, Small, 87-110, and listen to Beethoven, Symphony no. 5
for Feb 7, Small, 94-182. Think about Beethoven’s 5th as bedtime story.
for Feb 9, Small, 183-206. Breathe.....discuss...process (and take a 10-min quiz to show what you’ve learned)

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; the concept of voice; music as [performed] text vs. musicking as social process

Unit 2: Music, Drama and “Others”, or, Sonic Intertextualities through Carmen
8 lectures, Feb 14-Mar 9

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 on reserve

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

**Midterm, 20% of course grade, take-home due at the end of spring break, Tuesday Mar 21**

Unit 3: On Stars and Reception Communities (or, Callas Forever?)
4 lectures, Mar 21-30
Texts:
Bizet, Carmen sound recording starring Maria Callas
various, *Maria Callas. Life and Work*, DVD718; feature film *Callas Forever*, personal copy

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

Unit 4: You Better Work! Production, Reception and Identity Through Dance Club Music
4 lectures, April 3-13
Texts:
Various club mix CDs, TBA
guest lecture and demonstration by Fikentscher TBA

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 as sites/sources of memory; dance, “church”, and gospel
* second quiz probably on April 13

Unit 5: Dancing in the Street: Sound, Song and Cultural Politics
4 lectures, April 18-27
Texts:
Hitsville (boxed set of 4 CDs with booklet) : sound clips on website
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.
First Assignment, for Thursday, 19 Jan 2006

1. Listen several times to Franz Schubert’s little piano piece Moment musical in A-flat, D. 780. Take written notes of your perceptions, feelings, moments of pleasure, disappointment, boredom, whatever experiences this music evokes from you as you listen.

2. Read Kramer, chapter 1 (on line at “Course Documents”, in the folder entitled “Kramer”). If the musical description on pp. 22-25 seems incomprehensibly technical, don’t despair. Mentally squint at it to see if you can discern a) Kramer’s main points about the ways meanings can be discerned in this piece b) the distinction he draws between parable and paraphrase as ways to communicate perceived musical meanings in language and c) whether he tells his story about the piece as a parable or a paraphrase.

For ‘section’:
Listen again to the Schubert piece. Using your notes about your own listening experience, write a one-paragraph description of the piece as it seems to unfold for you (a paraphrase). Be sure to focus on the music more than on your responses to it. Then write a one-paragraph story that you think matches the story the piece could be imagined to tell. To produce this second paragraph, allow yourself to imagine the story.