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 audio files we can download from iTunes, 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 that produced the "Motown sound."

Texts (all required):

**plus frequent listening assignments as mp3 files on the Blackboard website for this course, viewing of four films TBA, and some reading from the Blackboard site.**

Requirements:

1. Attendance, participation, weekly one-page papers for section [graded P/F] 30%
2. Two quizzes or mini-papers in section, last week of Sept and 3rd week of Nov 20%
   These will each be worth 10% of the course grade, and will be designed by your preceptor.
3. Take-home Midterm, format TBA, due at class October 28 20%
4. 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 (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 your preceptor, 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 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, 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, soooooooo stoooooooopid to try....

I will accept no late final 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 V55.0730.010

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 unless otherwise announced]

Unit 1: Musical Meaning(s) (Hermeneutics and Ritual)

7 lectures and 4 sections, Sept 4-25

Texts:

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

Christopher Small, Musicking. The Meanings of Performing and Listening (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998) ISBN 081952759, $19.95

1a) Musical meaning through hermeneutics:

for Sept 4,  
Listen to Schubert, “Moment Musical in Ab”, D. 780, sound clip 1 on website, and

Read Kramer, ch. 1 (pp 11-28)

for Sept 9,  
Listen to Beethoven, “Moonlight Sonata”, either the three movements as recorded by Glenn Gould, on clips 3, 4 and 5 on the website, or the three movements as recorded by Alexander Kipnis, clips 6, 7 and 8 on the website; and

Read Kramer, ch. 2 (pp. 29-50)

for Sept 11 
Listen to Schubert, “Heidenroslein”, clip 2 on website; and maybe read Kramer, ch. 3

1b) Is hermeneutics enough to decipher musical meanings? Beethoven’s 5th symphony as a bedtime story

for Sept 16, Small, p. 1-87; try to attend some kind of live concert

for Sept 18, Beethoven, Symphony no. 5, all four movements, on website

for Sept 23 rest of Small? ; and Beethoven’s 5th as bedtime story for Sept 25 breathe.....discuss...process [quiz or paper crafted by your preceptor in section]

*a quiz in section or a mini-paper crafted by your 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  
7 lectures and 4 sections, Sept 30-Oct 23

**Texts:**

**Materials for Listening and Viewing:**
- Georges Bizet, *Carmen* (Maria Callas and Nicolai Gedda), XCD 16962 and web clips  
- Georges Bizet, *Carmen* (Julia Migenes and Placido Domingo), DVD 238, 155 min  
- Oscar Hammerstein, *Carmen Jones* (Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte)  
  DVD 1218, 105 min  

**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, format TBA due Tuesday Nov 4**

Unit 3: On Stars and Reception Communities (or, *Callas Forever*)  
4 lectures, Oct 30-Nov. 13, and 2 sections

**Texts:**
- Bizet, *Carmen* sound clips featuring Maria Callas (and XCD1962)  
- Wayne Koestenbaum, "The Callas Cult", ch. 5 of *The Queen's Throat* (New York: Poseidon, 1993), on website  
  *Maria Callas: Life and Work,* DVD718  
  *Callas Forever,* DVD 3663, 108 min.  

**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.

[see next page for final two units]
Unit 4: You Better Work! Production, Reception and Identity Through Dance Club Music

3 lectures, tentatively Nov 18-20-25 and 2 sections

Texts:
Various club mix CDs, sound clips on web
Guest lecture and demonstration by Fikentscher (possible field trip)

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

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

Unit 5: Dancing in the Street: Sound, Song and Cultural Politics

4 lectures, Dec. 2-4-9-11, and 2 sections

Texts:
Recordings of Langston Hughes reading his own poetry, MLK and Malcolm X speeches, sound clips from Hitsville (boxed set of CDs)

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.