Everyone talks about music in terms of emotions, taking it on faith that music communicates, expresses or contains emotions. But no one has ever seen an emotion under a microscope, and no one seems clear about whether the word represents something real, or whether it is more metaphor or fiction, a stand-in for what we absolutely do not understand. We also do not fully understand whether these emotions, if they really exist, can be meaningfully detached from what we call "ideas" without vastly misrepresenting human experience. Despite this vagueness, no art form is more associated with emotions than music. Although if music does “communicate emotions,” it does not do so any more than painting, ballet or theater, the vocabularies used to discuss music, especially from non-professionals, is rooted in approaches that stress “emotion” over “reason.” While most people would easily accept the idea that it takes a certain amount of “reason” to create “emotionally charged musical vehicles,” people are a bit more resistant to the notion that music also communicates ideas, or even that the separation of the two--ideas and emotions--is done at the expense of greater understanding. This course looks at a selection of musical works to be encountered in the context of a series of interdisciplinary readings to ask questions about just how (and why) we respond to music, and what role what we call "emotions" might actually play in the process.

Learning Objectives

In this course students will develop skills in reading critically; undertaking research and creative work; writing with competence, creativity and power about difficult topics; and getting experience speaking to an audience about various projects. We will also explore the question of how best to represent the effect of a musical work on a listener (as opposed to the written score of the composition) and how to speak effectively about music. Students, in developing their own final project, will be able to explore a larger question of interest to them over several weeks and gain experience presenting that project to the class through an oral presentation.
Grading

**Class Participation 10%**: Participation covers the following things: being on time to class and fully prepared with questions, fresh ideas, objections(!) to the readings of the day. Contributing to the discussion when appropriate. Obviously different students have different habits, experiences and personalities which will affect the way they participate in class discussion. No one in this class will ever be penalized for who they are, but in a seminar format all are will be encouraged to participate.

**Written Assignments 50%**

There will be six written assignments (including the 2 “maps”) and the first one will be ungraded and each of the others will count as 10% of the final grade. Please submit papers in Word format to my email address: mike.beckerman@gmail.com. All papers must be double-spaced.

**Final Project 40%**

The final project will consist of a 10-15 page paper. This may take the form of a research paper into some aspect--historical, philosophical or scientific--relating to the material of the course. Depending on your experience and your interests, this may also take the form of a more scientific effort with a plan drawn up in discussion with the course director. Finally you may propose an essay on some aspect of the course material. We will have a preliminary meeting the week of February 25th to discuss your project and a one-page (250-300 word) abstract will be due the following week. I will also accept proposals for collaborative projects, with the understanding that the amount of work done by each person in the collective is equal to (or greater than...) the amount of work expected from a single individual. In such cases all of the collaborators will receive the same grade for the project. In the third week of the semester I will devote some time to discussing the final project in more detail and offering some sample topics. The final paper is due **Tuesday, May 12th**.

**Disability Disclosure Statement**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

**Academic Integrity/Plagiarism**
The coin of the realm in academic life is the elusive “original idea.” Even half of one can make a career, and the genuine article can make you a star. Of course, the more original an idea is, the more people want to steal it, in fact, the surest proof that you actually an original idea is the very fact that someone else wants to represent it as their own. For this reason there are strict and draconian rules against plagiarism and other forms of academic misrepresentation. With so many online sources it is easy to mess up, cut and paste, and even forget you have done so. For this reason you must be extremely vigilant about making sure you clearly indicate where you have gotten such material. For more information about New York University’s policies about such things see:

https://guides.nyu.edu/c.php?g=276562&p=1844738

Office Hours: Tuesday 12-2 or by appointment

Meetings: We will have a preliminary meeting to discuss final paper proposals the week of February 25th. A signup sheet will be distributed prior to that week.

Syllabus

Jan 28: Course Introduction: The Problem with Music and Emotions (Renan Koen, piano)

Feb. 4: What is music anyway? Sample “Tour”
Reading: Daniel Levitin, This is Your Brain on Music, Chapter 1, “What is Music?” (PDF NYU Classes)
Assignment: Choose any 3 YouTube videos found by searching “What is Music?” Write a one page reflection on the reading and your viewing. What do we seem to understand about music? What don’t we understand? What questions seem to get left out of the mix? Due, Feb. 3

Feb. 11 A Brief History of Music and Emotions; Emotions and Music in History;
Reading: “Emotion in Culture and History,” by Nicholas Cook and Nicola Dibben
Music and Emotion, 45-72
“Music and Affect in the Baroque Period,” PDF (20 pages)
Assignment: Read the above article on the Baroque concept of affects and apply it to any piece of music that you listen to and know well from any genre. What kinds of “musical figures” are present, and do these create some sense of affect as understood by these Baroque music theorists. Your essay should be two pages, double spaced.

Feb. 18 An “Emotional Tour” of Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto #2/An “Intellectual Tour” of the Same Piece
Reading: PDF on NYU Classes (20 pages)
Listening: Brandenburg Concerto #2, various recordings available on playlist
Assignment: Using any technique you wish, make a map of *at least* one of the movements of the concerto. You can use any music theory chops you might have, or create an imaginary graph of how you imagine the piece to proceed. N.B. It will probably take several listenings and some careful thought to do a credible job. Three dimensional projects not required...but accepted!

Feb. 25  The Modern Study of Music and Emotions  
Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia*, pp. 260-304 [NYU Classes]  
**Note:** we will have meetings this week, signup sheet will be provided

Mar. 3  The Neurobiology of Emotion: Contemporary Perspectives  
http://syncproject.co/blog/2015/7/21/music-and-emotion  
**Assignment:** First Draft, Final Project Proposal Due (see Final Project description)

Mar. 10  Emotion and Meaning in Music (Hila Tamir)  
Reading from Hila Tamir TBA 20pp

Mar. 17:  NO CLASS SPRING RECESS

Mar. 24:  An Emotional Tour of Beethoven’s Symphony #5/An Intellectual Tour of the Same Piece  
**Reading:** E.T.A. Hoffman on Beethoven’s 5th (PDF-10 Pages)  
Various articles from the *Norton Critical Score* of the symphony (20 pages-PDF)  
**Listening:** Several recordings of Beethoven’s 5th will be available on your playlist.  
**Assignment:** As above with the Brandenburg Concerto, *make a map* representing the affective progress and process of either a single movement or the entire composition. Once again, you can rely on the score or your ears, but this will be an attempt to map the effects of the piece as you understand them. At the end, briefly speculate on the impossible question of whether the “whole” in this case is the sum of its parts, or somehow transcends them.
Mar.31  Music, Emotions and “Human Flourishing” (Anna Celenza)
Assignment:  Pick any article related to music and well-being. It could be related to
musical therapy for stroke victims; issues involving music and mental health, or
music, aging and dementia, and write a 3-4 page essay on best practices in that
particular area. We will discuss this project the week before.

Apr. 7  Music, Emotion, Taste, Personality and Affect Theory (Roger Grant)
Reading:  “Preference, Personality, and Emotion,” Peter Rentfrow and Jennifer McDonald
          Konečni, *Music and Emotions*, p.697-724; Noel Baer, Article on “Taste” in
          University of Chicago, *Theories of Media*:
          [http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/taste.htm](http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/taste.htm)
          Wikipedia article on “Taste (Sociology)”
          Roger Grant *Peculiar Attunements*, p.1-28

Apr. 14  Musical Emotions/Musical Reason: Towards a Synthesis
Reading  “Exploring the Habitus of Listening: Anthropological Perspectives,” Judith
          “Subject Position in Music,” Eric Clarke, *Ways of Listening*, p.91-125
          “Ideas and Emotion in Music from Sweelinck to Gideon Klein,” Michael
          Beckerman, (PDF) 20 pages
Listening:  Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, *Chromantic Fantasia*; Gideon Klein, *Trio for Strings*

Apr. 21  Final Report Presentations

Apr. 28  Final Report Presentations

Basic Course Bibliography

[The most important book for the course is the *Handbook of Music and Emotion*. While I will
place PDF’s of the required chapters on NYU Classes, it is strongly suggested that you purchase
the volume which will be available at the bookstore. Other readings may be assigned during the
run of the course.]


http://syncproject.co/blog/2015/7/21/music-and-emotion