

MU228: Listening to Music

Colorado College - Block 1 - 2023

Instructors: Lidia Chang, PhD
lchang2023@coloradocollege.edu
Packard 115

Ryan Raul Bañagale, PhD
rrb@coloradocollege.edu
Packard 111

Class schedule: 9:00-12:00, with some afternoon meetings & evening concert attendances
Office Hours: Professor Chang: by appointment: <http://tiny.cc/ChangOfficeHours>
Professor Bañagale: by appointment: <http://tiny.cc/BookingBanagale>

If you have questions about any aspect of this syllabus, please don't hesitate to ask!

Course Description: How do we create meaning and understanding from music? And what do we do with that information in our everyday lives? This course invites students to think actively and critically about the ways the world around them is constructed through sound. We will explore modes of listening across a wide variety of musical genres and traditions, past and present, considering the ways people hear music individually and together. Students will develop newfound ways to discuss music meaningfully in a broad range of contexts and to translate what they hear into what they feel and why that matters to our collective experience. This course is open to any interested student and welcomes a diversity of backgrounds and levels of experience.

Learning Outcomes: As a result of taking this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate how the act of listening to music engages and informs constructions of the people, places, and ideas that inhabit our world.
- Express the experienced emotions of a given piece of music using a combination of analytical terminology and descriptive language.
- Choose when, where, and how to use music to resist the predominance of productivity culture.

This course fulfills the “Social Justice” course requirement of the music major/minor because of the music we will encounter, the topics we will explore, and the mindsets we will invite.

This course fulfills the “Analysis and Interpretation of Meaning” (AIM) General Education requirement, outlined as given on the CC GenEd webpage:

AIM Curricular goals

- Students will apply practices of interpretation and critical analysis, such as close reading, to various forms of cultural expression, including texts, music, film, or visual and performing arts;
- Students will examine how various contexts - including structures of power and knowledge - shape the development, interpretation, and reception of various forms of cultural expression;
- Students will engage with texts or other forms of cultural expression to explore, contest, and create meaning and value.

AIM Learning outcomes

As a result of taking a course in Analysis and Interpretation of Meaning, students will be able to:

- Analyze texts, including artistic productions, or other forms of cultural expression, using specific theoretical or methodological approaches;
- Explain how multiple contexts shape the development and interpretation of texts, artistic productions, or other forms of cultural expression.

(Un)grading:

- Presence: (we)
- Journal Project: (you)
- Final Self-Assessment: (us)

For this course, we are adopting a practice known as “ungrading.” This does not mean you will not get a grade for the block. Rather, it means that we are letting the processes and practices of the course guide the assessment, rather than the other way around. And it means that you are an active participant in determining your overall grade.

There are many reasons why we are taking this approach. Our investigation into listening will draw explicit attention to the diverse and different ways we use this sense to navigate our respective and collective daily lives. We are not inside your head. We do not hear what you hear even when we listen to the same thing at the same time. Additionally, we all have different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.). How can we fully assess the “correctness” or “excellence” of how an individual listens to music? Rather, we are interested in how you experience and demonstrate personal growth with respect to your sonic engagement with the world, particularly through listening to music.

[Research shows](#) that grades reduce interest in learning, investment in risk taking, and quality of thinking. Our intention here is to take pressure off your expected engagement with the subjects at hand and to empower you to experience music, concepts, and/or methodologies that might be new or feel uncomfortable. We recognize that this approach may be unsettling for some students. We encourage you to connect with me at any point in time to discuss your personal progress. Ungrading may feel precarious. But we’re guessing you are up for it. After all, you signed up for a class simply called “Listening to Music.”

Presence - (we)

Listening and contemplation can happen alone, but they thrive in community. The success of our classroom experience will depend upon our combined presence and collective preparation. We ask that students show up as fully and as well-prepared as possible for all class sessions listed on this syllabus. Attendance will be taken and tardiness will be noted. ***Students may miss one day, no questions asked.*** After that, the overall course grade will be lowered by half a letter grade for each absence. Recurrent tardiness will also result in a lowering of the letter grade for the course. This portion of the grade is assigned by “we” professors, but we encourage you to discuss with us any individual circumstances that might inhibit your full presence and participation. See “communication” section below for more.

Your journal and writing utensils are the only items you should bring to class. Food and beverages are allowed so long as they are not a distraction. So that we can keep our focus on listening to music and each other, phones and other devices must be put away when you enter the classroom. They should not come out again until you leave that space—this includes class breaks. If something comes up in class that needs digital attention, please step out.

Journal Project - (you)

Each student will receive a blank journal on the first day of class. It will be where you house your visual notebook activities, ideas, journal entries, reflections, and other observations over the course of the block. Keep it close, keep it handy. Circle back along the way and add thoughts to what you have already notated—maybe do this in a different color? At the end of the block, you will submit this journal alongside a personal assessment of its contents guided by a set of prompts asking you to reflect on its quality and completeness. Based on that assessment you will also assign yourself a grade.

We expect four types of entries for each day of the block:

- 1) **Class Preparation:** Since you will only bring your journal to class, you will need to transcribe into it the most important ideas and/or quotations from our assigned reading. What do you want to discuss? What excites you? What confuses you? What ideas or connections does your preparation inspire? Frequently you will be asked to make a list of music familiar to you that might help us further understand (or counter) given concepts, theories, genres, and/or other insights about the experiences and outcomes of listening to music.
- 2) **Visual Notebook Activity:** Visual Notebooks are a pedagogical approach that decolonizes traditional methods of education by providing students and teachers with a notebook and materials to respond through visual mark-making to a series of prompts at the start of each class. They are process-oriented, providing a space for students to think in non-traditional ways to better prepare them for class, explore possible ways of knowing, and bring their whole selves to the academic space.
- 3) **Daily Journal Entry:** you will receive at least one prompt each day to assist in the further development of key concepts and listening experiences. These will take place both in preparation of and in class. You will determine what you think is an appropriate length, structure, and flow based on your reading of the prompt. Please begin each entry at the top of a new page with the header “Journal Entry #X.” Prompts for the first week appear on the syllabus below, others will be provided at the outset of each subsequent week.
- 4) **Class Notes:** everyone takes notes differently, so how you choose to use this space is up to you—but it cannot be blank. Use this opportunity to think about your current approach to class notes. What do you write down during class? What purpose does it serve now and for the future? Is it passive information or do you articulate “action items”?

Please use both the front and back of the pages, numbering each page in the upper outside corner. The first page of your journal will be your “Journal Entry” table of contents where you will list the title of each prompt and page on which it appears. Except for in-class journal notations which must be done initially by hand, you are free to type, print, and paste class preparation notes if you wish. You may also re-transcribe/supplement your class notes after class and paste those into your journal as well.

Although you will share/show your completed journals with your professors at the end of the block, we want this to be a space where you can freely express your thoughts and experiences. If there is a page you do not wish for us to see for whatever reason, simply paperclip is closed and we will ignore it.

Final Self-Assessment - (us)

This final self-assessment is a cumulative consideration of your efforts and experiences over the course of the block. It will incorporate your self-determined grade for the journal project as well as the additional items to be completed (see below). You will be provided with a set of prompts designed to capture individual comprehension, connection, reflection, and growth. Once you have completed your self-assessment you will assign yourself a final grade. Our preference is to agree with the grades that students give themselves, but we reserve the right to change grades as appropriate. We will also adjust this grade if needed based on the “presence” expectations given above. That is why this portion of the grade says “us.”

Additional Items to Complete:

Second Weekend (“midterm”) Reflection

Like the final self-assessment, you will receive a brief series of guided prompts allowing for reflection on your progress thus far in the course. We will review each of these and offer additional guidance and/or input as requested by individual students. You will give yourself an “in-progress” grade and will be asked to reflect upon this as part of your final self-assessment at the end of the block.

Critical Karaoke Presentation

Critical Karaoke was first introduced in 2003 at the second annual “Pop Music Conference” at the Experience Music Project in Seattle, Washington. For many years it was a regular event at the conference, with critics, scholars, musicians, and fans all sharing their insights, observations, and personal experiences with a piece of music that they considered (or once considered, even just for a moment) to be the best song ever. Each student will prepare and present a Critical Karaoke during week four. Additional details and guidelines will be provided prior to the final weekend.

Communication: We ask that you take care of yourselves during our block together. This not only reflects our belief that we often need more support than we ask for, but also that true creativity and scholarship can only occur when we have the mental, emotional, and physical space to do so. It is so important that we all communicate openly and frequently with one another. When unique or challenging situations arise, please reach out to one or both of us right away. We will find a way to navigate this together. ***We are committed to your personal success regardless of where you are along your present journey to commencement.***

Email is our preferred method of communication, and we will do our best to get back to you as soon as possible. We are available via email until 7pm each day, at which point we stop checking until the following morning.

Covid Contingencies: Our class will meet in person and will follow [CC’s current Covid-19 protocols](#). As long as students are following current guidelines, we want to empower individual members of class to maintain whatever levels of mitigation make our learning environment feel safe and productive to them. If you are ill, but testing negative, please wear a mask.

In the unfortunate situation that a student falls ill, tests positive, and/or needs to quarantine/isolate and cannot attend class, you should notify us immediately. Depending on the severity of the situation, we can develop/agree upon additional accommodations with regards to assignment extensions, incompletes, or petitioning for an excused grade.

In the unfortunate situation that illness impacts one or both of our abilities to be in the classroom as planned, we will notify you immediately. Contingencies in such a situation could include us zooming into the physical classroom, rescheduling activities/assignments given on the syllabus below, calling on “substitute” faculty members from the department, and/or the creation of asynchronous modalities.

Anti-Racism and Inclusivity: As a part of the broader structural and institutional systems that surround both society and the Academy, the realm of academic music studies is deeply rooted in a white supremacist conception of “excellence” in its approaches to creativity, scholarship, and engagement. Our challenge is to work within existing frameworks to envision an antiracist future both here at CC and throughout our collective experience. Accordingly, this class works towards centering anti-racist forms of teaching and learning. We will ask you to be self-reflexive and willing to confront your own assumptions and implicit biases. This is an ongoing process for all of us, including us as educators. We always welcome questions, comments, and feedback.

Academic Integrity: You are expected to maintain the highest standard of academic honor throughout this course. Please make sure you are familiar with the [Colorado College Honor Code](#), and especially the policy on plagiarism. Everything you hand in is pledged work. When citing text, images, or ideas that are not your own, please use a standard citation format, such as Chicago or MLA.

Artificial Intelligence and Chatbots: We will discuss the ways that Generative AI has and will continue to shape our musical world. Students are encouraged to explore resources such as ChatGPT, DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, and AudioCraft as they explore the possibilities and limitations of these emerging technologies. Here too, however, the honor code applies. If you rely on such technologies, please cite your usage accordingly. Our colleagues from Tutt Library have created a helpful primer for instructors and students regarding AI <https://coloradocollege.libguides.com/ai>

Accommodations and Accessibility: We abide by all of Colorado College’s policies regarding the observation of religious holidays, academic integrity, sexual harassment, racial, cultural, or ethnic discrimination, and accommodations for disabilities. All students have the right to full accommodations for disabilities, and we are happy to provide these for you. If this is pertinent to your situation, please speak with one of us as soon as possible. You will also need to register with the Office of Accessibility Resources (accessibilityresources@coloradocollege.edu) in order to best coordinate your accommodations so that your needs may be appropriately met.

Final note on the syllabus: The block plan provides many opportunities to dig deep and head in unexpected directions. We will do our best to stick to the syllabus, but it may become the case that we need to make changes to some of the assigned reading/listening/viewing as we move through all of this together.

If you have questions about any aspect of this syllabus, please don’t hesitate to ask!

Week 1: Listening & Theorizing / What is Music?

8/28 – Day 1: Intros & Overviews [class begins at 10:30am]

8/29 – Day 2: Outline of Common Vocabulary

Susan Rogers & Ogi Ogas, “Melody” and “Timbre” from *This is What it Sounds Like: What the Music You Love Says About You* (Norton, 2022): 87-112 & 165-195.

Journal Entry #1: My Musical Path

What brings you to this moment? A recent book by musicologist Jessica Bissett Perea dives deeply into the complexities of her personal experience as both an Alaska Native and native Alaskan. She refers to these as the “roots and routes” that allow us as readers to understand her “particular engagements with particular Peoples, places, and projects” (Perea, xvi-xvii). Dig deep and briefly explore your history and the ways it informs your listening to music here at the outset of the course. What are the people, places, and projects that have formed your listening preferences and passions over time?

8/30 – Day 3: “Listen to Everything All the Time…” and how we begin to organize it all

Michel Chion, “The Three Listening Modes” from *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (Columbia University Press, 1994): 25-34.

Pauline Oliveros, “Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice)” *MusicWorks* 75, Fall 2000.

Journal Entry #2: My Favorite Sound(s)

Think about the sound(s) that you most enjoy. It can be any kind of sound--produced by voices, or instruments, they can be (purposeful) musical sounds or more ambient, environmental sounds. Describe them to the best of your ability using the common musical vocabulary we have been practicing in class (timbre, pitch, tempo, etc.). Then, consider this sound (or sounds) in relation to the three listening modes outlined in the reading (causal, semantic, reduced).

8/31 – Day 4: How Do You Hear Music?

Susan Rogers & Ogi Ogas, “Realism” from *This is What it Sounds Like: What the Music You Love Says About You* (Norton, 2022): 33-60.

Evelyn Glennie, [“How to Truly Listen,” TED2003.](#)

Stephen Malinowski, [Animated Score for Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata,” YouTube,](#) 30 March 2020.

Journal Entry #3: Sensing Music

View Evelyn Glennie’s TED presentation and Stephen Malinowski’s graphic representation of “Moonlight Sonata.” What are the ways we sense and/or experience music beyond hearing it with our ears? Have or do you use these senses regularly when experiencing music? If so, how does it add to or subtract from the experience? If not, how does such knowledge add to or subtract from the experience?

9/1 – Day 5: Message Received?

Thomas Turino, “Introduction: Why Music Matters” from *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1-22.

Journal Entry #4: Signs

Turino covers a lot of ground in the assigned introductory essay assigned for tonight’s reading. Music matters for all sorts of different reasons, in part because the messages and meanings it communicates are different for every single person. Focus on the concepts of “Icon,” “Index,” and “Symbol” and try to unpack their meaning using a combination of Visual Notebook techniques that help you explore how all of this unfolds through the music that matters most to you.

FRIDAY AFTERNOON, 1-4pm: Students will meet one-on-one with Professors Chang and Bañagale for our first Ungrading check-in. Bring your journals and we’ll talk about how class is going for you so far and how we can best approach the remaining weeks of the block to maximize your personal growth.

First Weekend Assignment

Visit a place that plays music you can’t control (King Soopers, Rastall, Labor Day Lift Off, The Arc, etc.) and plan a time to spend a distraction-free 45-60 minutes in the space. During this time, with your journal at hand, do two things: 1) Document the music being played, either by identifying it on your own and/or using Shazam; and 2) Document the activity and energy of the people that inhabit that space. After you return home, reflect on the experience in what will be **Journal Entry #5: Captive Audience**. What was expected? What was surprising? What does it mean for you specifically to recognize or not recognize the music being played? How people engage or not engage the music? What else does this experience make you think of, musically speaking and/or otherwise?

Week 2: Listening to Music...

9/4 – Day 6: ...I Can’t Control

Jonathan Sterne, “Sounds Like the Mall of America: Programmed Music and the Architectonics of Commercial Space,” *Ethnomusicology* 41/1 (Winter 1997): 22-50.

9/5 – Day 7: ...with Mistakes

Susan Rogers & Ogi Ogas, “Authenticity” from *This is What it Sounds Like: What the Music You Love Says About You* (Norton, 2022): 13-30.

Joe Coscarelli and Marc Tracy, “How ‘Rich Men North of Richmond’ Reached the Top of the Charts,” *New York Times*, 21 August 2023.

9/6 – Day 8: ...from Multiple Perspectives

Dylan Robinson, “Introduction” from *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020): 1-25.

Van Jones and XiuhTexcatl Martinez, “Should We Give Land Back to Native Americans?” *Uncomon Ground* podcast episode 31, 15 June 2022.

12:15pm: Music Department Pizza Gathering (Music Library)

6pm: Olmeca Live in Concert (Fine Arts Center)

9/7 – Day 9: ...with a Message

Enjoy the Olmeca performance. No additional reading assigned.

9/8 – Day 10: ...I Don’t Want to Talk About [No Formal Class Meeting]

This is a planned wellness day. Take time to listen to music that you enjoy and do not want to subject to the analyses and considerations of our course. You may do this on your own or with others, including those not in the class. Note in your journal the titles and artists of the music you set aside for this listening experience, but do not write about the music. You will receive instructions for an individual Visual Notebooks activity.

Second Weekend Assignments

Read the introduction and first chapter of Jenny Odell’s book *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Melville House, 2019). Note aspects of her writing that speak to you and reflect accordingly in your journal. Take advantage of the time and space allotted here at the midway point of the block to think about how you use time and space. Complete the online “Second Weekend (‘midterm’) Reflection.”

Week 3: Stretching Your Ears

9/11 – Day 11: Music and Sadness

Tuomas Eerola, “Why Sad Songs Say So Much (To Some People, But Not Others),” *The Conversation*, 15 September 2016.

Pick a personal favorite sad song and bring it for sharing in class.

9/12 – Day 12: Artificial Intelligence

Sabrina Tavernise and Joe Coscarelli, “The Ballad of ‘Deepfake Drake,” *The Daily* podcast, 28 April 2023.

7pm: Quattro Mani Live in Concert (Packard Hall)

9/13 – Day 13: Who Cares if You Do Music?

Marianna Ritchey, “Resisting Usefulness: Music and the Political Imagination,” *Current Musicology* 108 (Spring 2021), 26-52.

Milton Babbitt, “Who Cares If You Listen?” *High Fidelity* VIII/2 (February 1958), 38-40, 126-27. Reprinted as “The Contemporary Composer and Society” in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, eds., *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), 529-534.

9/14 – Day 14: TBD

We are holding this day open to add or extend a topic that emerges of additional interest during the course of the block. Assigned reading/listening will be posted to Canvas.

9/15 – Day 15: Creating Critical Karaoke

Joshua Clover, et al., “Critical Karaoke,” *Popular Music* 24/3 (2005), 423-427

Michael Grace, “[Critical Karaoke of ‘Let the Sun Shine In.’](#)” *Critical Karaoke Radio Project*, May 2015.

Third Weekend Assignment

Most of your time this weekend will be dedicated towards the creation and rehearsal of your Critical Karaoke presentation. But you will also need to set aside time to view a 2010 TED Talk by Steven Johnson titled “[Where Good Ideas Come From.](#)” A journal entry prompt will be provided.

Week 4: Listening To Each Other

3/20 – Day 16: Critical Karaoke Presentations – Day 1

3/21 – Day 17: Critical Karaoke Presentations – Day 2

3/22 – Day 18: Final In-Person Ungrading Meetings

Students will meet one-on-one with Professors Chang and Bañagale for our final Ungrading check-in. Complete your final reflections prior to this meeting and bring your journals.