

Conrad Grebel University College
The University of Waterloo
Department of Music
Music 231: Music Cognition - Course Outline
Fall Term 2016

Classes: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-2:30 CGC 1302

Instructor: Dr. John Brownell, jbrownel@uwaterloo.ca or LEARN mail

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00-9:50, 11:30-12:50 or by appointment, CGC 1113

“The reason that most of us take part in musical activity, be it composing, performing, or listening, is that music is capable of arousing in us deep and significant emotions . . . If emotional factors are fundamental to the existence of music, then the fundamental question for a psychological investigation into music is *how* music is able to affect people.”

- John Sloboda in *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music* (Clarendon Press: 1985).

Overview

The disciplines of musicology and music theory have generally regarded music, especially music of the cultivated European tradition, as consisting of autonomous structures whose aesthetic beauty and value lie in the works themselves. This tendency reached its peak in the middle of the twentieth century with the total serialism of Milton Babbitt and his contemporaries.

Coincidentally, the middle of the twentieth century also saw the beginnings of psychological research into the reception and cognition of music. Memory, perception, and processing of musical information were rightly regarded as uniquely human abilities similar to language skills. The listener was seen as an active participant in the production of musical meaning rather than simply as a passive receiver.

Music 231 examines music from the perspective of the receptor rather than the transmitter. In so doing course participants will be encouraged to examine their own responses (aesthetic, emotional, and physical) to music.

Topics to be discussed will loosely follow the order of our text, William Forde Thompson’s *Music, Thought, and Feeling: Understanding the Psychology of Music*.

Text/Readings

Required:

Thompson, William Forde

2014 *Music, Thought, and Feeling: Understanding the Psychology of Music*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Additional material will be put on reserve and/or posted on LEARN from time to time.

There is a course website on LEARN. All assignments, lecture notes, test results and other information of note will be posted there. Stay tuned.

Recommended (but not required):

Huron, David

2007 *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Kirnarskaya, Dina

2009 *The Natural Musician: On Abilities, Giftedness and Talent*. New York: Oxford University Press

Levitin, Daniel J.

2006 *This Is Your Brain On Music: The Science of a Human Obsession*. New York: Dutton.

Mithen, Steven

2005 *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Patel, Aniruddh

2008 *Music, Language and the Brain*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Evaluation

The final grade breaks down as follows:

Introspective report (Due October 4)	10%
Mid-term examination (October 27)	30%
Short essay (Assigned topic, 7-10 double-spaced pages, due November 10)	20%
Choose ONE of the following:	
Essay (on an approved topic, due on date of final exam)	40%
OR	
Final examination	40%

MUSIC 231 LECTURE/READINGS SCHEDULE

Date	Topic
September 8, 13	Introduction, Musical Building Blocks Readings: Thompson Chapters 1, 3
September 15, 20	Musical Building Blocks (continued), Origins of Music Readings: Thompson Chapters 3, 2
September 22, 27	Music and Emotion Readings: Thompson Chapter 6
September 29, October 4	Music and Emotion Readings: Thompson Chapter 6 Introspective Report due
October 6, 13	Perceiving Music Structure Readings: Thompson Chapter 5 Short essay topics out
October 18, 20	Perceiving Music Structure Readings: Thompson Chapter 5 Music and the Brain Readings: Thompson Chapter 7
October 25, 27	Midterm exam (October 27) Music and the Brain Readings: Thompson Chapter 7
November 1, 3	Music Acquisition Readings: Thompson Chapter 4
November 8, 10	Performing Music Readings: Thompson Chapter 8 Short essay due Nov. 10
November 15, 17	Performing Music Readings: Thompson Chapter 8 Composing Music Readings: Thompson Chapters 9
November 22, 24	Composing Music Readings: Thompson Chapter 9
November 29, December 1	Music and Other Abilities Readings: Thompson Chapter 10