MUS - 507 — Composition Laboratory — Fall 2015

Syllabus

course number: Music 507
classroom: EMS
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NOTE: The best ways to get in touch with me are e-mail or text.

This syllabus is understood to be a contract between instructor and student. Expectations regarding performance, grading, course content and attendance are stated below. After reading this syllabus, students will sign and return the attached acceptance form. No grades for the exercises will be registered until the acceptance form is signed and turned in.

Description:

It is 50,000 B.C.E — You are a member of a group of shamans who are fascinated with the magic of sound.

In the largest sense, this is a class about artistic thinking: the roles, responsibilities, privileges and pathways of an artistic life. How can these provide a foundation for the music that we create?

Can there be such a thing as an Artistic Method? (cf Scientific Method) What would it be?

The composition lab is open ended and evolving from week to week. It is process oriented, not goal oriented.

Topics will range from Affective Neuroscience (the neurobiology of our emotions) to analysis of rhythmic structures, to designing and building original musical instruments, to sampling natural sounds and using these as the basis for electro-acoustic compositions, to projects emerging through creative brainstorming in and out of class.

The class will be split into two sections each week: hour 1 will involve reading, web searches, analysis. Hour 2 will involve performing music.

In addition each student will develop a special project in consultation with instructor. Examples would be: applying for a Fulbright; special topics paper on classic synthesis techniques; developing new composition methodologies.

Students with Disabilities
If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your
accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Required Textbooks, activities outside class, and other resources:

Required Readings:
  by Jaak Panksepp  (Author), Lucy Biven (Author)
• Musical Instrument Design: Practical Information for Instrument Design (Bart Hopkin) available used at Amazon

Required Resources:
• online device suitable for in class google searches (smart phone, laptop, tablet, Phablet)
• handheld audio recording device

Required Activities outside class:
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Suggested Resources::

• Sibelius 7 music notation software

• Music Language & The Brain (Ani Patel - NSI)
  http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_0_28?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=music+language+and+the+brain&sprefix=music+language+and+the+brain

• The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the 20th Century (Alex Ross)
  available used at Amazon for & also as iBook

• Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality (Susan McClary)
  http://www.amazon.com/Feminine-Endings-Music-Gender-Sexuality/dp/0816641897/ref=pd_sim_b_1

• Animals In Translation (Temple Grandin)
  available used at Amazon for & also as iBook

• Chadabe, Joel; Electric Sound — The Past and Promise of Electronic Music; Prentice Hall

• Roads, Curtis; the computer music tutorial, The MIT Press

Assignments and other requirements:

The class will proactively investigate the principles of Affective Neuroscience, and apply
these to creation of new musical works and the consideration of existing works.

This will culminate in the creation of music and installation art works to be presented at The Electronic Music Marathon on Dec. 5.

We will be deeply involved with investigation of natural sounds produced in a variety of environments around school and on field trips. Emphasis will be on increasing sensitivity to, and cataloging, the plethora of sonic phenomena that surround us every moment and which we are by and large ignore.

These will be considered in terms of their propensity for being used as the materials for creating musical compositions, as well as their correlation within their natural context and how that can be interpreted aesthetically in musical forms.

Students will be creating lists of sounds and deriving a taxonomy.

Students will be creating musical instruments – investigating principles of musical instrument design, and developing their own applications.

Students will form an orchestra utilizing these instruments and will perform original compositions for these at the Electronic Music Marathon Dec. 5.

There will be a weekly reading assignments.

Emphasis is on nurturing a warm, supportive environment for creativity.


Student Outcomes:

- Students will gain orientation with expectations, procedures and requirements of Global Composition.
- Students will explore interdisciplinary art.
- Students will become familiar with the scientific method of inquiry.
- Students will become familiar with basic principles of Affective Neuroscience.
- Students will apply these principles to original music compositions.
- Students will explore principles of acoustics
- Students will apply these to the creation of musical instruments
- Students will develop means for combining art and music.
- Students will create an orchestra of original, self-designed instruments.
- Students will create original compositions based on concepts derived from study of sound in nature.
- Students will rehearse their compositions and perform publicly.
- Students will become familiar with contemporary neuro-scientific views on the cognitive processes in music.
- Students will become familiar with contemporary neuro-scientific views on the affective processes in music.
- Students will present their current composition projects and understand how they fit into the weave of contemporary musical creative thought.
- Students will explore contemporary aesthetic ideas in the fine arts, including dance, theater, film, video, painting, sculpture, performance, sound art etc.
• Students will demonstrate integrated understanding of all previous outcomes through the creation of original works of music that incorporate the techniques and knowledge outlined above.
• Students will begin the creation of a dossier of compositions in preparation for the Junior-Level Exam

Grading: Course grade is based on:

1. Attendance — Missing class will result in grade dropping by .5 grade level.
2. Assignments — Missing an assignment will result in grade dropping by .5 grade level.

3. Concert attendance
   — students will attend at least one concert at:
     Carlsbad Music Festival Fri-Sun Aug 28-30 $15 or free
     http://carlsbadmusicfestival.org/
     SWARMIUS performing Sat. Aug 20, 4:30 PM, main stage outdoors (free)

4. Supplementary Presentation Attendance:

   — students will:
     1) contribute to the creation an original electro-acoustic composition/interdisciplinary installation composed during the semester; and
     2) volunteer for one of the many jobs necessary for presentation of a professional level public event.

Missing concert or failure to participate in production will result in class failure.

Lateness Policy: Late-arriving students are very disruptive. Please make every effort to be early for class. Grade will be lowered .5 grade level for every 3 late arrivals of 5 minutes. Arrival later than 15 minutes will be counted as absent (grade will drop by .5 grade level).

Syllabus
   (topics not necessarily in order, some will be multi-week)

• project
  • orientation: the importance of connecting with and courageously embracing one’s deepest musical loves; the danger of getting lost
  • assignment: create chronological list of each piece of music that has touched you deeply or profoundly (exposure) - bring to class to share next week

• Artistic Method: (suggestion)
  • observe and absorb
  • NOT judge
  • through an intuitive process feels one’s way forward to a response
  • that weaves together currents, ideas, subtexts, discoveries about the natural world and/or
  • draws and exposes hidden parallels among diverse cultural threads
and create an artifact that embodies these
to share with some portion of humanity
with the intention of generating a symbiotic, evolving conversation about how and why we are.

**Project**  •  **Found Object Instrument**
- brief history of musical instruments and instrument classification from pre-history
- introduction to Bart Hopkins
- assignment: bring in a found object - must be robust (not a soda cup, not car keys).. will be used all semester examples: toilet, car engine, bicycle

**Project**  •  **Observation**
There are always profound things happening right in front of our nose, but we do not see most of them.

- observation (Artistic Method): deep listening (pro-actively counteracting the tendency to render most sensual info as redundant and to filter it)
- assignment: choose a square of sidewalk. Photograph carefully. Observe it & describe it in detail in a log.
- Every week before 207/507 revisit and add new information to the log

**Project**  •  **The beauty of acoustic instruments**
**SHAKERS**
-- everybody gets an egg shaker
-- Record an egg shaker in class and observe the sonogram
-- Compare this with the sonogram of an egg shaker sample from a sound library
-- Take it home, Record it, listen carefully to it, describe it in detail and try to find something that can replace it.

-- Recording technique: performative aspect, how does the sound change as one creates it? How does it translate a physical gesture, varying pressure and speed?

-- How much of this is necessary to create interesting sounds? How useful are sounds that are completely uniform – i.e. each one exactly same volume, and each one having exactly the same shape, in the frequency domain and in the time domain?

Description: physical description and emotional description – how does it make you feel and why? How much of that is based on a cultural connection to the actual sound and how much of it is something else?

-- Create a composition for egg shaker, and then replace it with your surrogate instrument

--- Possibilities: scissors, brushes, scraping nails on springs, various types of shakers, cracking an egg, removing tape, Velcro, rubbing fingers across foam, shaking a bottle of water, Sandpaper blocks, guiro, scraping nails across a coil binder on a notebook

-- Look in unlikely places
Micro sounds: sounds that are normally too quiet to be considered seriously for any type of performance but if they are recorded up very close can be amplified and made into something that reveals very beautiful and complex acoustic signatures.

What do all these things have in common?

-The emotional connection that we have with sounds that are part of our environment – what do they mean to us? How much does the musical aspect of them have to do with a deeper emotional connection to the sound? What types of emotional connection do we have to the sounds that are made by the potential surrogates?

**project**  •  **Field trip: $.99 store (found instruments)**

**project**  •  **field trip to MCASD La Jolla**

**project**  •  create a unique musical instrument

**project**  •  create a Neolithic Orchestra

**project**  •  create a notation system for the orchestra

**project**  •  bring in a rhythm loop from one of your favorite tunes, analyze and re-create with sample-based virtual instruments of your own design.

•  **Preparation for final projects for Electronic Music Marathon**