

PHL 247: Philosophy of Music

Fall 2020

ONLINE

Monday and Wednesday, 10:20-11:40

Please read through this syllabus carefully at the beginning of the course.

Instructor: Fred Gifford, Department of Philosophy, gifford@msu.edu

Zoom Office hours: Thursdays, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., as well as right after class, and by appt.
3 credits

D2L page: <http://www.d2l.msu.edu>. This site also has a copy of the syllabus, handouts from class, other optional but very helpful material.

ONLINE: This class is of course online, synchronously. Students need to attend class by connecting to the following zoom link:

For Class:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://msu.zoom.us/j/91852427055>

Meeting ID: 918 5242 7055

Passcode: 854523

For Office Hours:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://msu.zoom.us/j/96633874827>

Meeting ID: 966 3387 4827

Passcode: 123830

The more extensive “invitations” are in an “Announcement” on D2L

Readings:

Theodore Gracyk, *On Music* [but it turns out this is available electronically through MSU Libraries]

Course pack.

The other required readings will be available electronically, either through MSU Libraries or through the course’s “D2L” site (<http://www.d2l.msu.edu>). This site also has a copy of the syllabus, handouts from class, other (optional) readings, and lots of optional but very helpful material.

There is a more detailed course description on separate page in D2L.

The course examines philosophical issues relating to music's status as art and as an expression of human experience. Major emphasis is on critical reflection of modern assumptions about the meaning and value of music.

On the one hand, a goal is to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of music, and thereby enrich your life, but it will also be to gain skill at drawing out philosophical (and other underlying) questions that arise concerning various things that you talk to others about.

By the end of the term, you should be able to (1) articulate some of the leading theories in the philosophy of music, (2) articulate salient objections to some of the leading theories in the philosophy of music, and (3) defend your own view on a significant issue in the philosophy of music. [SEP]

There is no specific musical background that is required for the course, nor (being an intro course) is there any specific philosophical background required. Some background in one or the other will be helpful – and I'll want you to bring what you know from outside this course to these course discussions.

As a philosophy class, this class will involve a fair amount of writing – to learn to express and reflect on your ideas.

Format

Within the online format, the course will involve a mix of “lecture” and discussion. There will be some “lecture”, but there will be a lot of discussion (sometimes in small groups). All students are expected to complete the required readings that are assigned for each meeting, bring those readings to class, and also participate actively in classroom discussions.

Writing Assignments

1. Two short papers: These papers will be responses to specific questions handed out or posted at least a week in advance. They are to be focused philosophical arguments that answer the specific question that is asked. They are not book reviews or summaries of the readings. The short papers (as well as the final essay – see below) must each include

- (1) a clear thesis,
- (2) sound arguments (valid arguments with true premises), with relevant supporting evidence,
- (3) at least one strong objection to the thesis, and a response to the objection(s).

(More detailed directions will be provided later.)

Essay exchange: A couple days before these papers are due, we will spend a class period discussing drafts in small groups. A couple of days before that, the drafts will be due on D2L, so that they can be distributed to the other members of your group in time to be read beforehand. These drafts are required, as is participation in the “essay exchange”. (The drafts will be graded “pass/fail”. Failure (including failure to turn them in) will result in a loss of one grade point for the paper.)

PAPER #1 (approx. 1000-1250 words)

PAPER #2 (approx. 1250-1500 words)

2. Final essay (2500 to 3000 words). Students will choose their own topic for the final essay from any of the topics discussed during the semester, or seen to be relevant from what we have covered (but not the specific topics of Paper #1 or Paper #2). However, the topic must be approved by the instructor well in advance (see below). Note that the essay is not to be an empirical or historical

research paper, but rather a philosophical essay informed by the required readings (and discussion) and any other relevant supplementary readings the student, in consultation with the instructor, considers appropriate. More detailed directions for the final essay will be distributed on D2L.

Details of assignments will appear on D2L. Specific assignments (topics and specific instructions for short paper 1 and 2) will appear at least a week before the assignment is due.

Note (for both 1. and 2. above) that late papers will be accepted without penalty only in unusual circumstances and only if cleared with the instructor in advance. Otherwise late papers will have their grade lowered by 0.5 (on a 4.0 scale) for each 24-hour period for which the paper is late.

3. “Discussion board”

These will be “short written assignments” to be shared with (and then commented upon by) your classmates. Most weeks there will be a prompt sometime early in the week to which you are to write what is in effect a very short essay (i.e., serious written assignments), and not as just any sort of response. 150-200 words. Read the question carefully. Typically due Thursday night by 11:59 p.m.

Additionally, in each of those weeks, there will be peer responses to the online discussion of others. Students will respond to two other students (75 words for each one) in their peer discussion groups by Saturday at 11:59 p.m.

[Note: there is also be an “Ungraded Discussion Board”; on the one hand, this will simply be a place where you can have discussions of topics that you choose (as opposed to follow some specific “prompt”). On the other hand, it is a place to follow up on lines of thought you have discussed from earlier (once those discussion boards have been closed).]

Sometimes I will ask a specific question (or give you a specific “prompt”) in relation to the class discussion we have had (or perhaps sometimes the prompt may instead specify a particular reading. Sometimes it will be more open. But one standard form will be the following: What, to your mind, is the most interesting or important unanswered question raised in or by the class meeting prior to the day the paper is due, and why? (Note: you can only do this if you were in class.)

There will be 10 weeks in which you will be assigned one of these discussion posts. You must turn in 8 of these assignments (both the initial entry and the responses to colleagues). (If you wish, you may write 9 (or all 10), in which case only the best 8 will count toward the final grade.)

Late papers will be accepted only in very unusual circumstances and only if cleared with the instructor in advance. Otherwise late papers will receive a grade of 0.0. (Of course, as mentioned above, you needn’t do all of them, and only your top 8 will count toward your grade.)

See separate sheet (on D2L) on **Discussion Posts** for further details.

Evaluation Criteria and Grading

Final course grades will be calculated on the basis of the following percentages

Short paper #1	15%
Short paper #2	20%
Final	35%
Discussion Board	30%

Especially good contributions to class discussion will also be taken into consideration (along with sustained improvement) in borderline cases when final course grades are calculated.

PHL 247 MUSIC Class Calendar and Reading Assignments

WEEK 1:

Wednesday, Sept. 2 INTRODUCTION

Gracyk, *On Music*, ch. 1: More Than Meets the Ear [PART] (1-15)

WEEK 2:

Wednesday, Sept. 9

Gracyk, *On Music*, ch. 1: More Than Meets the Ear [PART] (15-34)

Levitin, ch 1 (What is Music? From Pitch to Timbre){PART} (13-43)

WEEK 3

Monday, Sept. 14

Gracyk, *On Music*, ch. 2: With and Without Words: Listening with Understanding
PART (35-54)

Wooten, Victor -- Music as a Language

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3yRMbH36HRE&ab_channel=TED-Ed

Henschen, Jon, "The Tragic Decline of Music Literacy (and Quality)"

[Aug 16, 2018, on Intellectual Takeout (<https://www.intellectuالتakeout.org>)

<https://www.intellectuالتakeout.org/article/tragic-decline-music-literacy-and-quality/>

Wednesday, Sept. 16

Gracyk, *On Music*, ch. 2: With and Without Words: Listening with Understanding rest:
(54-67)

WEEK 4

Monday, Sept. 21 TASTE/ AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

Levitin, Ch 8 (My Favorite Things: Why do we Like What We Like?) (223-246)

Wednesday, Sept. 23 SOMETHING MORE ON TASTE/ AESTHETIC JUDGMENT??

Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music (...Stop Worrying and Love Led Zeppelin)*

Introduction: Aesthetics and Popular Music (1-8)

Davies, "The Evaluation of Music", in *Themes in the Philosophy of Music*
ch. 12, PART: (195 to mid-199)

[listening task]

WEEK 5

Monday, SEPT 28

Davies, "The Evaluation of Music", in *Themes in the Philosophy of Music*
-rest of ch. 12 (199-212)

Wednesday, Sept. 23

Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Led Zeppelin.*

Ch 1: "Separating Aesthetics from Art" (11-40)

Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters* (from chapter 1: pp. 1 to mid 5)

[note relevance of Gracyk's discussion of music "as art" in *On Music*, ch. 1]

Draft of Paper #1 due Friday night, Oct. 2: by 11:59 p.m

WEEK 6

Monday, Oct. 5 ESSAY EXCHANGE

Wednesday, Oct. 7

Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters*, pp. 11-35

WEEK 7

Monday, Oct. 12 EMOTION:

Gracyk, *On Music*, ch. 3: Music and Emotion (69-102)

Wednesday, Oct. 14 EMOTION

Levitin, Ch 6 (Emotion)) (169-192)

Jacob Collier Plays the Same Song In 18 Increasingly Complex Emotions | WIRED

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWHpdmDHrn8&t=307s>

OPTIONAL: Emotional responses to music | Hauke Egermann | TEDxGhent

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzFgoaZ9-VQ>

WEEK 8

MORE ON EMOTION? THE INEFFABLE?

Monday, Oct. 19

Gracyk, *On Music*, ch. 4: The Siren Voice of Transcendence, PART: pp. 103-119

Wednesday, Oct. 21

Gracyk, *On Music*, ch. 4: The Siren Voice of Transcendence, PART: pp. 120-140

WEEK 9 VALUES/AESTHETIC VALUES

Monday, Oct. 26

Levinson, "Values of Music", ch 6 of *Musical Concerns* (67-87) [CP]

Sheinbaum, *Good music: what it is and who gets to decide* [CP]

Intro 1-11

Wednesday, Oct. 28

Sheinbaum, *Good music: what it is and who gets to decide* [CP]

Chapter 1: Serious: The Cultural Work of Classical Music and the Trap of Musical Sound" (20-50)

WEEK 10

Monday, Nov. 2

Review Levinson, Scheinbaum

Wednesday, Nov. 4 ANTICIPATION, REPETITION AND RHYTHM

Levitin, Ch 4 (Anticipation) (111-131)

End of week 10 ***Draft of Paper #2 due Friday night, Nov. 6: by 11:59 p.m***

WEEK 11

Monday, Nov. 9

ESSAY EXCHANGE

Wednesday, Nov. 11 IMPROVISATION AND JAZZ

Nachmanovich, *The Art of Is: Improvising as a Way of Life* (1-38, 136-48) [CP]

End of week 11 ***Final version of Paper #2 due Fri. night, Nov. 13: by 11:59 p.m***

WEEK 12 MUSICAL ONTOLOGY, ETC.

Monday, Nov. 16

Davies, Ch 1: "John Cage's 4'33": Is it Music?" [DAVIES] (11-29)

Wednesday, Nov. 18

Kivy, Peter, ch. 14, "Music, Language, and Cognition: Which Doesn't Belong?", in Kivy,
Music, Language, and Cognition: And Other Essays in the Aesthetics of Music.
Clarendon Press, 2007. (214-232)

WEEK 13 TECHNOLOGY

Monday, Nov. 23

Handout, "Music and Technology" [D2L]

Katz, *Capturing the Sound*, Intro (1-7), Ch. 1 (8-47) [CP]

Theberge, *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music / Consuming Technology* (1-5)
[CP]

Wednesday, Nov. 25

Tod Machover, "Shaping Minds Musically"

<http://opera.media.mit.edu/articles/shapingminds.pdf>

"Computer Software that can Turn You into a Songwriter"

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/02/arts/music/02walk.html?_r=0

Chorost, "My Bionic Quest for *Bolero*"

<http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/13.11/bolero.html>

Rolling Stone, "Read Exclusive Excerpt from Neil Young's New Book 'To Feel the Music'"

<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/neil-young-new-book-to-feel-the-music-digital-excerpt-883599/>

WEEK 14 TECHNOLOGY

Monday, Nov. 30

“Instrumentation and Improvisation”, Levinson, *Musical Concerns* (144-154) [CP]

Machover, My Cello

<http://web.media.mit.edu/~tod/media/pdfs/MachoverMyCello.pdf>

Gifford, Music/Instruments/Guitar&Piano [D2L]

Wednesday, Dec. 2

Graham, “Music and Electro-sonic Art” in Kathleen Stock, ed., *Philosophers on Music: Experience, Meaning, and Work* (209-225)

[ELECTRONIC RESOURCES]

WEEK 15

Monday, Dec. 7 SUMMING UP

Draft of Final Paper due this Monday night, Dec. 7, by 11:59 p.m

Wednesday, Dec. 9 FINAL PAPER EXCHANGE

Final Paper due Friday night, Dec. 18, by 11:59 p.m.