

Music 40 — Topics in Music History: The Piano

Winter 2014 @ 2A (Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00–3:50 PM; x-hour, Wednesdays, 4:15–5:20 PM)

Faulkner Recital Hall

Prof. Steve Swayne

General information

From shortly after its creation in 1700 to the present day, the piano has occupied a central role in the cultural, socioeconomic, political, and musical life of women and men throughout the world. This class will examine these lives from the perspectives of literature and film, engineering, political science, history, anthropology, and music. Readings include *Vanity Fair*, films include *The Pianist*, and events include a visit to the Steinway factory in Astoria, Queens.

Texts and materials

The required texts are:

James Parakilas et al., *Piano Roles: Three Hundred Years of Life with the Piano* (Yale, 1999)

William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (Norton Critical Editions, 1994)

Jane Austen, *Emma* (Norton Critical Editions, 4th ed., 2011)

While there are many editions of the two novels we are reading for this course, I have chosen these two editions because of their notes, to which we will have occasion to refer during our exploration of these novels. I will be referring to the pagination in these editions in my lectures and in course materials. I will place these editions on reserve for the course.

Videos and audio for the course will be available online either through Library Reserves or through the course website (Canvas, NOT Blackboard).

Grades for the work in this course

I will be grading you on both the *amount* of work you do for the class and the *quality* of that work. My intent is to give you all clear pathways to achieve the final grade you wish. Those who wish a higher grade will need to do more work at a higher critical level; those who are content with a lower grade may do less work and engage in less criticism.

For grades below a C, students may elect not to do any work outside of class. In the case of all grades above a D, it is expected that students will complete the reading, viewing, and listening assigned in the syllabus AND will listen to, watch, and read about aspects of the piano and its tendrils beyond the readings, viewings, and listening assigned in the syllabus.

E-level work: Failure to show up for class and turn in written work. Critical engagement = non-existent

D-level work: Spend no additional time per week exploring material beyond that presented in class. Critical engagement = non-existent

C-level work: Spend roughly one additional hour per week exploring material beyond that presented in class. Critical engagement = low

B-level work: Spend roughly two additional hours per week exploring material beyond that presented in class. Critical engagement = moderate

A-level work: Spend roughly three additional hours per week exploring material beyond that presented in class. Critical engagement = high

Critical engagement entails drawing together the course readings and viewings, lectures, and class discussions with the external work you do and will be reflected in the biweekly essays that you turn in. Low critical engagement would involve relying principally on easily retrievable information (e.g., websites, short videos) to augment the coursework and reporting on this additional information in your essays. High critical engagement would involve synthesis of coursework and external work that consists mostly of articles, essays, books, and extended audiovisual works (e.g., references from bibliographies, other novels, an exploration of the *Goldberg Variations*, reading from the books placed on reserve for the course, etc.). In all cases, a final essay that synthesizes your engagement with the materials in this course and your external work is required at the end of the course.

While your output may vary from week to week, it is expected that students wishing to achieve higher grades will demonstrate consistency over the course of the term in their external work habits. In addition, much of the class will be built around discussing the reading, viewing, and listening, so it is important for students to keep current with the assignments and to come prepared to contribute to all in-class conversations.

(OPTION 1) A summary of grade weights for the course is:

Short essays (four @ 10% ea.)	40%
Final essay	20%
Class presentation	15%
Peer evaluation	10%
Class attendance and participation	15%

(OPTION 2) Students who wish to write longer papers are encouraged to do so. In this case, a summary of grade weights for the course is:

First paper	25%
Second paper	35%
Class presentation	15%
Peer evaluation	10%
Class attendance and participation	15%

Students are expected to abide by the rules spelled out in “The Academic Honor Principle at Dartmouth College,” and you will be asked at the end of the term whether you have abided by the honor principle.

A note about the syllabus

The topics as listed are guides only and may be varied or altered depending on student interest, available guests, and the like. All reading, viewing, and listening assignments are to be completed by the class hour on the day listed, regardless of any changes in topics. All assignments are due in class or on the course website on the day listed.

Some personal words

The single most difficult aspect of studying music is that music is fundamentally an aural art. One cannot “speed up” hearing a piece; such an activity would distort both the piece and one’s understanding of the piece. Neither can studious listening be treated as a background activity that accompanies other tasks. Many, if not all, of these pieces may require more than one hearing for you to be able to remember them or to talk knowledgeably about them. The serious student will allocate both the necessary time and concentration not only to the reading but also to the listening.

Fundamental to this emphasis on listening is a *commitment* to remain attentive. Music in our society functions as a background activity; we are socialized to talk when we hear music. I have discovered that students often have a difficult time remaining attentive to listening, especially when examples are played in class. Because of this, I have adopted the following guidelines for in-class listening:

1. When music is played in class, it is expected that there will be no talking.
2. If there is talking while music is playing (or while a video is being viewed), I will stop the music and wait for the talking to cease.
3. If, when the music begins again, there continues to be talking, I will ask the parties who are talking to leave the room.
4. If any student is asked more than once to leave the room, I will meet with that student and counsel him/her to consider withdrawing from the class.

I recognize that this is a strong stance, but I know of no other way to stress the importance of *active attentive listening*, and I invite all students to engage in active, attentive listening with me.

My office is in the Hop down the narrow hallway near the entrance to Paddock Library; my regular office hours are Monday and Friday, 3-4:30 p.m. While I hope to be in my office during these times, it is best to contact me via BlitzMail before you drop by. If you are not available at any of these times, we can schedule an appointment that is mutually convenient. I will answer your BlitzMail in as timely a fashion as I can. And I encourage you to seek me out if you are having difficulty, if you encounter any physical, medical or psychiatric impediments to your learning, if you are having success, or if you just want to talk.

I am looking forward to learning with you.

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Dates	Topic	Reading assignment PR = <i>Piano Roles</i>	Viewings and listening	Papers and presentations
Week 1				
1/7	course introduction; piano autobiographies; tickling the ivories; keyboards before the piano			
1/9	Cristofori; identification with the piano	PR, ch. 1	<i>The Pianist</i> Chopin	
Week 2				
1/14	Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and the triumph of the piano	PR, ch. 3	<i>Note by Note</i> Beethoven	
1/16		<i>Emma</i> , Vol. 1		
Week 3				
1/21	domestic life and the piano	PR, ch. 2, and 212–36	Listening TBA	Essay #1 due (Option 1)
1/23		<i>Emma</i> , Vol. 2		
Week 4				
1/28	the romantic/Romantic piano	PR, ch. 5	<i>The Piano</i> Schumann and Mendelssohn	
1/30		<i>Emma</i> , Vol. 3		
Week 5				
2/4	setting the piano on fire (figuratively and literally)	PR, ch. 6	Liszt Anne Lockwood	Essay #2 due (Option 1)
2/6		<i>Vanity Fair</i> , chs. 1–14		

Date	Topic	Reading assignment	Viewings and listening	Other assignments
Week 6				
2/11	You're the Piano Man: bringing the piano to a home near you	PR, ch. 4	<i>The Piano Lesson</i>	First paper due (Option 2)
2/13		<i>Vanity Fair</i> , chs. 15–29;	Billy Joel	
Week 7				
2/18	The piano speaks in dialect	PR, ch. 7	Debussy and ragtime	Essay #3 due (Option 1)
2/20		<i>Vanity Fair</i> , chs. 30–42	Tori Amos	
Week 8				
2/25	The making and unmaking of the piano and pianists; pianos with an ethnic dialect	PR, ch. 8	<i>Hangover Square</i>	
2/27		<i>Vanity Fair</i> , chs. 43–56	Art Tatum and Fats Waller Kapustin Lang Lang	
Week 9				
3/4	The end of the piano era?	PR, ch. 9 and afterword <i>Vanity Fair</i> , chs. 57–67	Cage and Stockhausen Keith Jarrett and others	Essay #4 due (Option 1)
3/6	student presentations		TBA	
Week 10				
3/12 @ 5 P.M.				Final essay/paper due