

# Perception of Compositional Structures

## Fall 2017

### Course Syllabus

*\*\*\*subject to modification\*\*\**

Course Number(s): MUTH 654/MUCO 636/MUMT 615  
Course Instructor: Dr. Claire Arthur  
Time & Location: Th 11:35-2:25, Music A-412  
Office: TBD  
Office Hours: By Appointment  
Email: claire.arthur@mcgill.ca

### Course Description

This course focuses on the interaction between music theory, compositional structure, and music perception. By critically comparing literature in music theory and music perception, we will investigate questions such as: What is the purpose of a musical theory? What is the goal of a compositional framework? What aspects of musical structure can be perceived, and how do our perceptual capabilities relate to theoretical and compositional objectives? Throughout the course we will return to these fundamental questions as they apply across various compositional paradigms (e.g., counterpoint, serial composition) and theories of musical organization (e.g., sonata theory, Schenkerian analysis, set theory).

### Objectives

By the conclusion of this course, students will:

- Become familiar with the literature in music cognition as it relates to the perception, memory, or aesthetic value of various compositional structures such as: thematic development, large-scale form, modulation and key relations, and voice-leading.
- Learn to read music analyses and theories with a critical eye on the intended purpose or goal, its basis or foundation, and any claims on the psychological reality of a given music-theoretic structure.
- Learn to critique scientific studies of music perception, especially with regards to the soundness of music-theoretic arguments or their musical plausibility.

### Instructional Method

This course will be interactive, and highly participative. Discussions and student presentations will make up the bulk of in-class time. What each student will gain from this class will depend directly on everyone completing the assigned readings and contributing to class discussions. Students will, at times, be asked to participate in the design and execution of in-class listening experiments. This may involve composing and arranging, or editing or otherwise modifying existing audio files. Students may occasionally be asked to work in small groups.

### Course Website

All required reading, assignments, and other for-credit activities will be posted in a timely manner to the content page of the MUTH654/MUCO636/MUMT615 *mycourses* page. A course bibliography, consisting of the required course readings as well as your individually-selected readings will be assembled and published to the course website: <https://perceptionofcompositionalstructures.github.io/> In addition, student projects and papers will be published to the course website (with student permission) for those interested in the research outcomes of their peers.

## Evaluation

Our objective is to enjoy stimulating discussion, and discussion will form the bulk of in-class time. Accordingly, the quality of the course will depend in large part on the level of everyone's "active engagement" with the course readings, activities, and exercises. Active engagement consists of completing any readings or short exercises, participating in class activities or experiments, as well as coming prepared for class with notes, questions, comments, or other points for discussion.

### Grading

- Active Engagement: 30%
- Midterm Assignment: 35%
- Final Assignment: 35%

## Topics

The suggested material for the course is divided into three large units. However, I have attempted to keep the schedule and material flexible to make accommodations for the varying interests of the class. For each unit, we will investigate issues in music theory/composition and music perception as they relate to the given topic. These units are currently structured as follows:

**Classical Organizing Structures.** This unit would cover topics such as form, tonal relationships, melodic and harmonic closure, and thematic and motivic development.

**Counterpoint.** This unit would cover topics such as voice-leading, imitation, text setting and lyric intelligibility.

**Music Beyond the Classical Canon.** This unit would cover topics such as polytonality, 12-tone and atonal composition and set theory, world music, and electroacoustic or other contemporary styles of composition.

## Communication

Please feel free to email me if you have a question, concern, or would like to arrange office hours. However, please note that I frequently do not check my email after 5pm or before 9am. Please allow me 24 hours to respond to your email.

## McGill Policies and Resources

*In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This right applies to all written work that is to be graded, from one-word answers to dissertations.*

*McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)) for more information).*

*As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.*