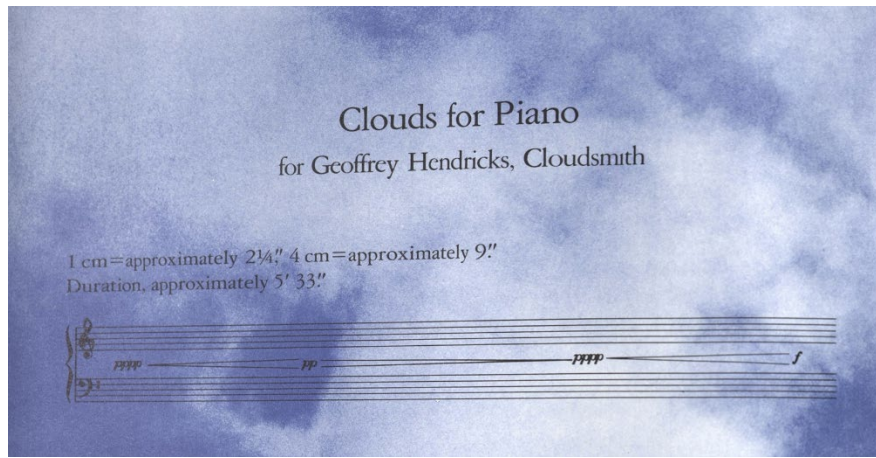


## **Music: A Cultural Experience**

GEN\_MUS\_170\_0: Introduction to Music – Spring 2021  
Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:00 AM - 12:20 PM, online course



### **Instructor:**

Ben Weissman – [benjaminweissman2017@u.northwestern.edu](mailto:benjaminweissman2017@u.northwestern.edu)

### **Office hours:**

Wednesday 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM via Zoom: <https://northwestern.zoom.us/j/9933510946>

I'm otherwise available by appointment, Monday - Friday. Just let me know – I'm always glad to find a time to meet.

### **A Note:**

My hope is to make this course a meaningful experience in these odd and troubling times. I know that the online learning environment can be differently taxing and uncomfortable than in-person learning, while also prone to intrusions and distractions. Online learning can also feel rather isolating and rigid, both of which are counterproductive qualities in any course. I have designed this course to include spaces for discussion and sharing with your peers and I have designed each assignment such that it can be completed in multiple ways. Ultimately, my priority as your instructor is your well-being. Please let me know how I can best support you over the quarter. I'm flexible, and I want to make this course work for you.

### **Course Description:**

What is music? How is it used? What can it do? What can we learn through putting ourselves in the shoes of listeners from the past? In this course, we will study the building blocks of music, episodes of music-making in the past century, and the people who created and experienced it.

The course is designed in week-long units, each of which places music in conversation with a conceptual topic, including aesthetics, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, religion and spirituality, film, and technology. We will consider the role of music—popular, classical,

experimental, and traditional—in the birth of sound film, in the Civil Rights movement, the Cold War, the techno scene, the internet, and other global contexts.

Each unit will include reading, listening, and viewing. Class time will be comprised of lecturing, discussing assigned materials, listening to music, and practicing oral skills of description and interpretation. Weekly writing assignments will ask students to reflect on reading and listening assignments. Grades will be based on active participation, discussion board engagement, a music analysis project, a project proposal, and a final project.

This course is open to all students; no prior musical training is required.

### **Materials:**

All materials will be available through Canvas. No purchases will be necessary for this course. All text, audio, and video materials will be provided on Canvas, posted on pages according to course week. Within each page, materials will be posted under the date by which you are expected to have read, listened, or watched them.

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### **Evaluation methods and grading:**

Grades will be composed of the following categories:

Attendance & Participation:	20%
Assignments	
Discussion Board Posts:	17.5%
Discussion Leading:	2.5%
Writing Assignments:	30%
Final Paper Project	
Project Proposal & Peer Review	5%
Final Project:	25%

Grades will be assigned on the following scale:

A = 100-93;	A- = 92-90;	B+ = 89-87;	B = 86-84;	B- = 83-80;
C+ = 79-77;	C = 76-73;	C- = 72-70;	D = 69-60;	F = 59-0

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**Class rhythm:** As you plan your quarter, it may be helpful to understand the overall rhythm of this course. In general, class will meet virtually on Tuesdays, 11-12:20 PM, via Zoom. Please plan to have reviewed assigned readings and media before the start of class. At these sessions, I will lecture, discuss concepts and topics from the readings and your postings, ask for your thoughts and questions about the readings and media, and play media. Sometimes I will give you prompts to discuss in break-out groups.

On Thursdays, you will meet in 1 of 3 discussion groups of 9-10 people for 30 minutes. You will always meet with the same group. Please plan to have reviewed assigned readings and media

before the start of class. Each week, one student from each group will come up with questions about the assigned materials and help me co-lead the discussion. These sections will be more discussion-based than Tuesday class meetings, and the expectation is that nearly everyone participates in each of these sections.

On Friday, you'll post on a discussion board. You will write your short reflective posting in response to a specific prompt I will pose each week. Half of these prompts will be connected to an assignment, and the other half will ask you to respond to your peers or reflect on other course material. My intention is that the discussion boards can be a place where you share your findings, discoveries, and insights with one another.

**Attendance:** Attendance is recorded by Zoom, which I will review after class. You are expected to arrive on time, prepared to participate actively in discussion of the material. Assigned readings and listenings must be completed before each class, as listed on the schedule on Canvas. If you know you will not be able to attend a synchronous class meeting, please let me know beforehand. If exceptional circumstances arise, please contact me as soon as possible. Beginning with the second unexcused absence, student attendance grade will be penalized. Excessive absence is potential grounds for failure of the course.

This course will abide by the School of Music's attendance policy:

Students are expected to attend all sessions of courses...for which they are registered.... When one-time conflicts arise...the student's attendance obligation for the scheduled course...still stands.... For exceptional circumstances, contact the student affairs office for assistance.

**Participation:** Students are expected to actively participate, both in class and on the discussion boards. Your contributions are crucial to the success of this class. Discussion involves listening to and engaging with your fellow students, alongside contributing your questions, comments, and thoughts. Participation grade will be calculated according to the following criteria:

A: You contribute frequently (almost every session). Your comments reflect excellent preparation, build from the comments of others and/or offer direction for the discussion.

B: You contribute sometimes. Your comments reflect good preparation, sometimes build from the comments of others and/or sometimes offer direction for the discussion.

C: You contribute rarely. Your comments reflect adequate preparation, occasionally build from the comments of others and/or occasionally offer direction for the discussion.

D: You contribute very rarely or not at all. As a result, there is little or no basis for evaluation. Or, you contribute to class but your contributions reflect inadequate preparation and offer no direction for the discussion

**Discussion board postings:** I value quality over length in your posts. I consider how your interactions help create a communal space for a lively and multifaceted discussion. To this end, please explain and clarify your interpretations and reactions, citing specific passages in a text or a timestamp in a video. In responding to other students' posts, extend their interpretation with more information, propose alternative readings, or make connections to ideas from inside or outside of the course. Your writing can be casual, but it must be grammatically correct and clear. I will not reply to everything you post, but I will read it and occasionally jump in. I will draw from discussion boards to shape our synchronous class discussions.

**Friday Forum Post (150-200 words):** Each Friday Forum will pose specific questions about readings, listenings, and assignments of a given week. I am interested in your thoughts, reactions, interpretations, and responsive questions which should demonstrate comprehension and thoughtful consideration of course materials. You will be required to post before you will be able to see your peers' responses.

**Forum Responses (50-100 words x2):** Some weeks, you will instead be asked to post two (2) replies to your peers' Friday Forum Posts. The purpose of the online discussion boards is to encourage active engagement with the course materials, as well as to spark and sustain the productive exchange of ideas within a learning community of peers. It is imperative to remain respectful of all viewpoints and positions. The goal is to have rich conversation – not just posting a basic answer to my prompts. Part of your responsibility is to ask additional questions that may take the conversation to new places.

**Discussion Co-leading:** Each Thursday, one student from each discussion group will come up with 3 questions or talking points about the assigned materials and will help me co-lead the discussion. What kinds of questions will produce thoughtful conversation and engagement with the materials? How might you relate a reading and its ideas to your contemporary experience of music? After establishing membership of each discussion group, you will select which reading about which you would like to co-lead the Thursday discussion.

**Assignments:** You will complete several assignments that are based on themes we discuss in class. These are designed to provide you with the opportunity to apply your knowledge of course concepts and to hone your skills in thinking and writing about music. Full descriptions and rubrics of each assignment will be posted on Canvas.

**Pop Transcription** - Due 4/16: Select a pop song from a provided list and create a visual representation of one minute of audio from that song. You will then describe the choices you made in representing the different sonic components of this song.

**Musicking Journal** - Due 4/30: Track 3 days of musical experiences and consider what music you listen to, why and how you listen to it, and what you might interpret from your listening habits.

**Soundwalk Reflection** - Due 5/21: Go for a walk and listen to the world around you. Make an audio recording, take notes, and then reflect on your experience of the sounds of the world.

**Live Concert Report** - Due 6/4: Attend a live (online) performance of music, and write about your experience of the concert structure, audience, and social atmosphere. Check the Live Music Online document on the course homepage to find a free online concert.

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**Final Project – Make a Mixtape:** For your final project, you will curate a playlist of 9-12 recordings organized around a theme of your choice. I invite you to think broadly about the principles you might use to curate this mixtape and spend some time identifying music that you find interesting and/or enjoyable. Your theme could have to do with genre, style, a specific location and time, a social movement, a network of people, a record label, or anything else.

**Project Proposal - Due 5/7:** Write a 250-300 word proposal describing your mixtape concept and the theme(s) that will unite your recordings. I will offer individual feedback on your proposals, and then after a week for revision, you will share your proposals with your peers to give and receive further feedback.

**Final Project – Due 6/12:** Your final mixtape will be in two parts: (1) a titled playlist that lists your chosen 9-12 recordings, and (2) an essay of 1500-1750 words that describes how you curated your mixtape. This document should function like “liner notes” for your mixtape, explaining your theme(s), describing the significance of each chosen recording, and demonstrating an understanding of course concepts through musical description. Your liner notes should demonstrate that you have researched your theme.

Your essay can be submitted as a written document or delivered orally in a podcast-like or video essay format. Audio or video would give you the opportunity to include musical excerpts, text slides, images, or video. If working in an audio/video format is appealing, but you have questions about how to do this, let me know.

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**Academic integrity:** Please be aware of University-wide policies regarding dishonesty in academic work, as well as those specific to the School of Music. Information can be found at [www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/#guide](http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/#guide). If you are not sure of what constitutes plagiarism, or of the circumstances under which you are obligated to cite a source in your writing, please consult the documents found through this site. I am glad to answer any questions about citation, quotation, and proper use of sources too.

**Accessibility:** Northwestern University is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university’s established accommodation process

([accessiblenu@northwestern.edu](mailto:accessiblenu@northwestern.edu); 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential under FERPA regulations.

**Academic Support:** If you are ever unsure about any assignment, expectation, or policy, please let me know. I want to be as clear and reasonable as possible, and your feedback is essential to facilitate this. If you are looking for help with a course or academic challenge, check out [Academic Support & Learning Advancement](#). They offer drop-in tutoring, study groups, academic coaching, and individual consultations for all undergraduates. For more information: [northwestern.edu/asla](http://northwestern.edu/asla) or [asla@northwestern.edu](mailto:asla@northwestern.edu)

**Communication:** I will use Canvas mail to share Zoom links, announcements, and any changes or clarifications to the reading, listening, or viewing assignments. Please check your email regularly for updates and contact me if you have any questions or concerns. I will do my best to respond to your messages within 24 hours, Monday to Friday.

**Electronic device policy:** For our synchronous meetings, please use only the device(s) and software you need to be digitally present and engaged. I'll never ask you to turn your webcam on, but please be prepared to speak.

**Zoom Recording Policy:** This class or portions of this class will be recorded by the instructor for educational purposes and available to the class during the quarter. Your instructor will communicate how you can access the recordings. Portions of the course that contain images, questions, or commentary/discussion by students will be edited out of any recordings that are saved beyond the current term.

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**Important dates (all listed assignments are due at 11:59 PM):**

Friday, April 16:	Pop Transcription assignment due
Friday, April 30:	Musicking Journal assignment due
Friday, May 7:	Final Project Proposal due
Friday, May 14:	Final Project Proposal peer review due
Friday, May 21:	Soundwalk assignment due
Friday, June 4:	Live Concert Reflection assignment due
Saturday, June 12:	Final Projects due

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**Week 1 – Introduction**

Thursday, April 1

**Week 2 – Defining Music**

Tuesday, April 6

Matt Sakakeeny, "Music," from *Keywords in Sound* (pp. 112-122)

Discussion Forum: Getting to know you

Thursday, April 8

Ben Raliff, "Introduction," from *Every Song Ever* (pp. 5-12)

Michel Chion, "The Three Listening Modes" from *Audio Vision* (pp. 25-34)

Friday, April 9

Week 2 Discussion Forum Post Due

**Week 3 – Describing Music**

Tuesday, April 13

Bonnie Wade and Patricia Shehan Campbell, Chapter 1 from "Global Music Cultures" (pp. 5-18)

Thursday, April 15

Jennifer Judkins, "Style," from *The Routledge Companion to philosophy and Music* (pp. 134-143)

Jeremy Orosz, "Lil Nas X, the Old Town Road, and the Futility of Genre Labels," *Musicology Now* (blog).

Friday, April 16

Pop Transcription assignment due

Week 3 Discussion Forum Post Due

**Week 4 –Music & Sociality**

Tuesday, April 20

Thomas Turino, "Why Music Matters," from *Music as Social Life* (pp. 1-16)

Thursday, April 22

Christopher Small, "Music and Musicking" (pp. 1-18)

Friday, April 23

Week 3 Discussion Forum Responses Due

**Week 5 – Music & Identity**

Tuesday, April 27

David Hesmondhalgh, "Towards a critical understanding of music, emotion and self-identity" from *Consumption, Markets & Culture* (pp. 329-343)

Recommended: John Sloboda, "Music as a cognitive skill," from *The Musical Mind* (pp. 1-10)

Thursday, April 29

Carl Wilson, "Let's Talk About Who's Got Bad Taste," from *Let's Talk About Love* (pp. 89-105)

Friday, April 30

Musicking Journal assignment due  
Week 5 Discussion Forum Post Due

## **Week 6 – Music & Technology**

Tuesday, May 4

David Morton Jr., "Hi-Fi," from *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology* (pp. 129-140)  
Midterm check-in survey

Thursday, May 6

Jonathan Sterne, "The MP3 as Cultural Artifact," from *New Media & Society* (pp. 825-842)

Friday, May 7

Final Project proposal due  
Week 5 Discussion Forum Responses Due

## **Week 7 – Music & Film**

Tuesday, May 11

Gillian Anderson, "Presentation of Silent Films, or, Music as Anaesthesia," from *The Journal of Musicology* (pp. 257-264, 270-271, 283-288, 294-295 excerpts)

Thursday, May 13

Robyn Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," from *Beyond the Soundtrack* (pp. 184-202)

Friday, May 14

Final project proposal peer review due

Week 7 Discussion Forum Post Due

## **Week 8 – Music & Gender & Sexuality**

Tuesday, May 18

Susan McClary, "Sexual Politics in Classical Music," from *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (pp. 53-67 and 79 excerpts)  
Intersectionality Intro



Thursday, May 20

Martha Mockus, "Meditation," from *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality* (pp. 37-57 excerpt)

Recommended: Alex Coiro, "Daniel Weintraub Presents "Deep Listening," The Story of Pauline Oliveros," from *Ravelin*: <https://www.ravelinmagazine.com/posts/daniel-weintraub-presents-deep-listening-story-pauline-oliveros/>

Friday, May 21

Soundwalk assignment due  
Week 8 Discussion Forum Post Due

### **Week 9 – Music & Ethnicity**

Tuesday, May 25

David Hesmondhalgh, "International times: Fusions, Exoticism, and Antiracism in Electronic Dance Music," from *Western Music and its Others* (pp. 280-300)

Thursday, May 27

Alexa Woloshyn, "'Welcome to the Tundra': Tanya Tagaq's creative and communicative agency as political strategy," from *Journal of Popular Music Studies*

Optional: Drew Nelles, "The Rise of Tanya Tagaq," from *The Walrus*:  
<https://thewalrus.ca/howl/>

Friday, May 28

Week 8 Discussion Forum Responses Due

### **Week 10 – Music & the Future**

Tuesday, June 1

Robert Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," from *Media, Culture & Society* (pp. 1086-1100)

Thursday, June 3

Dieter Roelstraete, "The Way Ahead," from *Afterall* (pp. 112-119)

Friday, June 4

Live Concert reflection assignment due  
Week 10 Discussion Forum Post Due

Saturday, June 5

Spring classes end

### **Finals week**

Monday, June 7 – Spring examinations begin  
Saturday, June 12 – Spring examinations end

Saturday, June 12  
Final projects due by 11:59 PM