

PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

MUS/PHIL 244

FALL 2016

MWF 12:00–1:10 p.m.

Old Main 311



Course Description and Objectives

This course considers the nature of music and its significance.

The specific questions we will address include: What is a musical work? What determines whether a performance of a work is authentic or good? How does music relate to other art forms and media? Why do we sometimes find music to be not just enjoyable but also intensely moving and even profound? More broadly, in what ways can music be meaningful? We approach these questions through a careful examination of key texts and arguments in both historical and contemporary musical aesthetics, and with respect to a variety of musical styles, from “classical” to jazz, rock, and hip hop.

The purpose of this course is not only to deepen your understanding of music by reflecting on fundamental philosophical questions, but also to deepen your understanding of philosophy by examining questions about a ubiquitous human practice.

By the end of the term, you should be able to

- **Articulate** some of the leading theories in the philosophy of music.
- **Articulate** salient objections to some of the leading theories in the philosophy of music.
- **Defend** your own view on a significant issue in the philosophy of music.

course details

Website: Accessible via <https://classroom.google.com>

Designation: Satisfies the HUM foundations requirement.

Readings: All readings are available as PDF's. I expect you to print them out and bring them with you to class. (For further details, see p. 3 below.)

Technology: Given that they often pose a distraction, laptops, tablets, and other such devices will **NOT** be allowed in the classroom—except for students with a documented accommodation from the CTL.

Course Requirements

This course involves reading, writing, and discussion. You will need to absorb material on your own outside of class. You will write the equivalent of 18–23 pages over the course of the term. You will need to speak up in class and demonstrate active learning, not passive absorption. For a more thorough explanation of what I will expect from you in this class, click [here](#).

Attendance & Participation (15%)

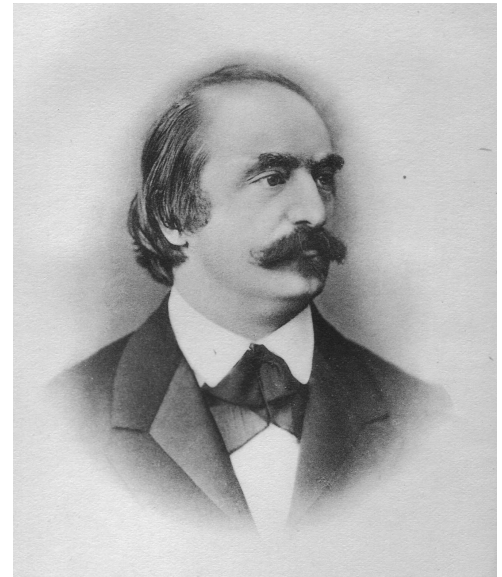
You are required to read assigned material carefully, and to attend class and participate regularly. Attendance and participation constitute an important part of your grade. Comments and questions should be voiced as they arise in the course of the class. You should prepare for class by identifying passages in the reading you are particularly intrigued or troubled by and prepare at least a few remarks on or questions about them in anticipation of our discussion.

Music Analysis Papers (40%) You will write four short papers of roughly 600–750 words each in which you will analyze a given piece of music in terms of one or more of our assigned readings.

Musical Reflection Paper (15%)

You are also required to attend a live musical performance and write a short paper of roughly 750–1000 words in which you reflect upon your experience in terms of one of the course's central concerns. You can write about jazz night, a choir concert, a KGS performance, a band playing in the Rog Lodge, etc. **Any event involving musicians performing live is acceptable.**

Term Paper (30%) You will also write a term paper of roughly 2000–2500 words. The paper will follow a traditional philosophical format: interpreting a philosophical position, developing your own argument in response to it, and dealing with objections to your argument.



Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904) was an Austrian music critic, historian, and theorist. He was absolutely integral to the development of the analytic tradition of musical aesthetics we will be engaging with this term. Hence, he is the first author we'll read and discuss together.

Professor: Dr. Brandon Polite

Office: Old Main 304
Phone extension: 7240
email: bpolite@knox.edu

Office Hours

MWF 10:30–11:30, and by appointment



late assignments

If you need an extension because of circumstances beyond your control, get in touch with me as far in advance as possible before the assignment is due. Having a lot of work pile up from other courses or activities is not a "circumstance beyond your control." It is your responsibility to look over the term's required work and to plan ahead on when to work on which assignments so that all can be handed in on time. Work turned in after the deadline without a prearranged extension will be docked 10 points for each day late, including weekends.

accommodations

If you have a documented disability (learning or otherwise), and you need a reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please consult with me immediately at the outset of the course so we can design a solution that will help you be successful in the class. To have your disability documented, you must contact Stephanie Grimes (sgrimes@knox.edu) in the CTL.

Grades

Attendance & Participation	15%	Silent attendance cannot earn full credit
Music Analysis Papers (4)	40%	Due Dates: 9/28, 10/7, 10/19, 11/4
Musical Reflection Paper	15%	Can be submitted at any time between 10/19 & 11/11
Term Paper	30%	Due 11/20 by 10 pm

Syllabus

1. Beginnings

9/12 M Introductions

9/14 W Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, ch. 2

9/16 F Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, ch. 3

2. What Is a Musical Work?

9/19 M Peter Kivy, "Platonism in Music: A Kind of Defense"

9/21 W Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," pp. 5–19

9/23 F Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," pp. 19–28

9/26 M Lydia Goehr, "Being True to the Work"

9/28 W Further discussion

Music Analysis 1: John Cage, *4'33"* or Yoko Ono, "Toilet Piece/Unknown"

3. Works, Improvisation, and Covers

9/30 F Andrew Kania, "Works, Recordings, Performances: Classical, Rock, Jazz"

10/3 M Andy Hamilton, "The Art of Improvisation and the Aesthetics of Imperfection"

10/5 W Cristyn Magnus, P. D. Magnus, and Christy Mag Uidhir, "Judging Covers"

10/7 F Further discussion

Music Analysis 2: Your choice

Readings

For most class meetings, you will be assigned a reading, either a journal article or a chapter from a book or anthology. All readings are in PDF form and can be accessed by clicking the links embedded in the M's, W's, and F's to the left of each on the syllabus. You can also access them via Google Drive, either in the shared "Phil Music Readings" folder or by searching for their title or author: <https://drive.google.com>.

Note. You can only access the readings if you are logged in to your Knox email account, which you can access via <https://my.knox.edu>.

Expectations. I expect you to print out each reading and bring it to class with you. I reserve the right not to call on any student who doesn't have the reading in front of them during class discussion.

Dollars and Sense. To save yourself money on printing fees, simply choose not to print the title and copyright pages for those readings that have them. You can also print many journal articles two pages per sheet. To save paper (and thus help the environment), you should always print double-sided.



4. Understanding Music	
10/10	M Roger Scruton, "Analytical Philosophy and the Meaning of Music"
10/12	W Peter Kivy, "It's Only Music: So What's to Understand?"
10/14	F Diana Raffman, "The Meaning of Music"
10/17	M Further Discussion
Music Analysis 3: John Coltrane, "Giant Steps"	
10/19	W Fall Institute (No Class)
5. Music and Emotion	
10/21	F Susanne K. Langer, <i>Philosophy in a New Key</i> , "On Significance in Music," pp. 165–81
10/24	M Susanne K. Langer, <i>Philosophy in a New Key</i> , "On Significance in Music," pp. 181–99
10/26	W Jerrold Levinson, "Music and Negative Emotion," pp. 306–22
10/28	F Jerrold Levinson, "Music and Negative Emotion," pp. 322–35
10/31	M Jenefer Robinson, "The Expression and Arousal of Emotion in Music"
11/2	W Further discussion
Musical Analysis 4: Christoph Willibald Gluck, "Che farò senza Euridice?" from <i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	
11/4	F Presentation: How to Write a Philosophy Paper
6. The Music of Our Lives	
11/7	M Aaron Smuts, "Rubber Rings: Why Do We Listen to Sad Songs?"
11/9	W Kathleen Marie Higgins, <i>The Music Between Us</i> , "Comfort and Joy"
11/11	F Theodore Gracyk, <i>Listening to Popular Music</i> , "Taste and Musical Identity"
11/14	M Further discussion
11/20	Su Term Paper due by 10 pm

Participation

Participation will be graded on the following scale:

- A** One regularly participates voluntarily in class discussion, often leading the discussion (without ever monopolizing it), asking questions of the teacher and other students, and providing thoughtful, detailed comments on the readings, ideas, and issues raised in discussion.
- B** One regularly participates voluntarily in class discussion, sometimes leading the discussion, asking questions, and providing thoughtful comments on the readings, ideas, and issues.
- C** One rarely volunteers, but generally contributes to the discussion when called upon, responding with fairly thoughtful if not detailed or developed comments.
- D** One rarely volunteers, but sometimes contributes to the discussion when called upon, even if comments are short and relatively underdeveloped.
- F** One never volunteers and hesitatingly contributes to the discussion when called upon, giving brief, one-word or one-sentence responses.

Advice. Are you someone who often finds it difficult to speak up in class? If so, I have written a document in which I respond to the main reasons students have given me for their difficulties, which you can read [here](#).

grading scale			
A+	100 – 97.7	D+	69.9 – 67.7
A	97.6 – 93	D	67.6 – 63.4
A-	93.3 – 90	D-	63.3 – 60
B+	89.9 – 87.7	F	59 – 0
B	87.6 – 83.4		
B-	83.3 – 80		
C+	79.9 – 77.7		
C	77.6 – 73.4		
C-	73.3 – 70		

Honor Code

This course, as any other at Knox, operates within the parameters set by the Honor Code. Please note, in the everyday business of this course, students are encouraged to talk through all course material with one another and to function as interlocutors for one another. This extends to preparing to write your papers. However, each student is required to write their own work, to cite all sources fully, and to give explicit credit where particular formulations of claims, arguments, and examples are the product of cooperative work.

Music Analysis Papers

Please respond to each of the following prompts in **roughly 600–750 words** (or 2–3 pages) and submit your responses via Google Classroom before the indicated times. Links to recordings of each piece and any other relevant information about them will be available on Classroom.

These are not merely opinion papers. Your paper must have a thesis and you must make use of at least one of our readings in advancing it.

Prompts

Number 1 (due Wednesday, 9/28 by midnight): Is the piece you've selected to analyze, either Cage's *4'33"* or Ono's "Toilet Piece/Unknown," a work of music? What constitutes the work in this case? (E.g., the sounds? the score? historical context?)

Number 2 (due Friday, 10/7 by midnight): Reflect upon the nature of either jazz or rock music by means of comparing (a) two distinctive versions of a standard or (b) a cover and the original on which it's based, respectively. (You must provide me with links to the relevant recordings.)

Number 3 (due Wednesday, 10/19 by midnight): What, if anything, do you understand when listening to John Coltrane's "Giant Steps"?

Number 4 (due Friday, 11/4 by midnight): Is there any emotion in Gluck's "Che farò senza Euridice?" that exists independently of the text? If so, how? If not, why not?



Written Work

You will submit all of your papers on Google Classroom. For each assignment, a new Google Doc will be created for you. You can choose to type directly into it or copy and paste your work from another word processor, such as Microsoft Word or Pages for Mac.

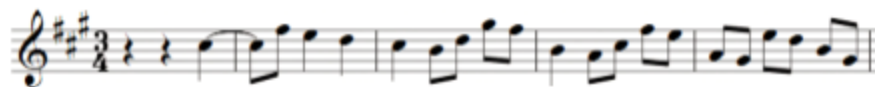
If you need help with a paper, don't hesitate to email me, come to my office hours, or set up an appointment to meet with me outside of class.

Writing tutors are available in the CTL, often on a walk-in (first come, first served) basis, Monday through Friday, from 10 am to 4 pm. You should also avail yourselves of the Red Room writing tutors, who are always available on a walk-in basis, Tuesday through Thursday, from 7 to 9 pm, in Seymour Library.

Musical Reflection Paper

In this paper, which should be **roughly 750–1000 words** (or 3–4 pages) long, you will use a live musical performance that you've attended this term, as either a performer or an audience member, as a prompt for a philosophical exploration of some important aspect of music or musical experience.

This is not merely an opinion paper. You are to take your experience as data to be used in favor of a conclusion the legitimacy of which you are trying to convince the reader. That is, your paper must have a thesis and you must make use of at least one of our readings in advancing it. For the sake of coherence, you should probably limit yourself to no more than three sources—although one would be sufficient.



Possible Topics

- The differences and similarities between attending a performance and listening to a recording.
- The differences/similarities between attending performances of different (sub)genres of music (the relevant norms, practices, etc.): classical v. jazz, punk v. metal, etc.
- Music's relationship to the other arts (dance, theatre, poetry, literature...).
- The relationship between works, scores, and performances; rehearsals and the live show; or versions and originals.
- The relationship between composers, performers, and listeners.
- Music's ability to arouse emotion.

- Instrumental music's (in)ability to embody or communicate extra-musical ideas.
- The nature of musical understanding.

This list is not exhaustive. Just be sure your topic is relevant to what we have been reading and discussing throughout the term.

rolling submissions

You can submit this paper any time after **Fall Institute**, but it is due by no later than midnight on **Friday, 11/ 11**.

Term Paper

Instructions Respond to **one** of the following prompts in **roughly 2000–2500 words** (or 7–9 pages) with a clear analysis of the relevant course readings. Choose **one or two** readings as your main source(s) and **no more than two** others to make use of in advancing your thesis.

Guidelines First provide a careful reconstruction of your main source(s)'s argument(s): present each claim the author makes as they approach a conclusion. Be efficient but careful. For the purposes of your paper, you need not focus on the entire text, but rather the specific arguments that help you address the prompt you've selected. There is no need to incorporate texts beyond the course readings. This is not a research paper.

After you've reconstructed the author's argument, engage with the text by providing a critical analysis or comparison to one or two other texts. Feel free to use a few, carefully chosen musical examples to support,

illustrate, or challenge a philosophical point that you outline in your paper.

In the process of reading and engaging your chosen texts, you will undoubtedly articulate many potential objections to what the writer has stated, and you will certainly encounter details that you find puzzling or even contradictory. Do not ignore these potential criticisms, but at the same time avoid the temptation to merely dismiss or “debunk” the text. Instead, first try to place these questions in a broader context: Can the larger scope of the argument withstand this particular inconsistency? Does it affect the underlying “stability” of the philosopher's system? What might have led the writer to include this perplexing detail? Your goal should be to enter into a dialogue with the texts, to sympathize with them, and to begin to understand how the ideas articulated by these philosophers build a complex system of claims and conclusions.



parting wisdom

“The inexpressible depth of music, [...] so easy to understand and yet so inexplicable, is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being, but entirely without reality and remote from its pain[.]”

— Arthur Schopenhauer, *WWR* 1:264

“Songs are really simple. [...] But because they're so simple, it's like bird-watching, you know. You gotta know something about birds or you won't see anything: just you and your binoculars and a stupid look on your face.”

— Tom Waits, in *Tom Waits on Tom Waits*, p. 214

Prompts

- Is Hanslick right that music's beauty resides wholly in its formal elements?
- Can formalism adequately explain the way music is expressive of emotions?
- What is a musical work?
- What determines whether a performance of a work is authentic?
- How should we understand and evaluate multiple versions of the same musical work (performances, covers, etc.)?
- What is it for music to be moving? (What is the relation, if there is one, between music being (a) expressive and (b) moving?)
- What is involved in understanding music?
- Why does music hold such a central place in our lives? (How does thinking about music help us to better understand what it is to be human?)

create your own

You can also create your own question, which you must submit for my approval by no later than **Friday 11/11**.

name those tunes

The snippets of sheet music placed throughout this document are, in order, from

- Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9*
- Mozart, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*
- Berry, “Roll Over Beethoven”
- Brahms, *Intermezzo in A major*
- R. Strauss, *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*