

MUS421–571.1: Electroacoustic Music Composition

Spring 2016 – Fridays 10:00 am – 12:45 pm

Instructor: Dr. Kirsten Volness

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Course Website: <http://www.kirstenvolness.com/mus421.htm>

Course Blog: <http://mus421.tumblr.com/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students will learn various tools and techniques of recording and audio production to meet the course's primary goal: creating original electroacoustic music compositions. We will also examine the technological and stylistic development of the medium since the early 20th century through reading, listening, and writing assignments and short quizzes.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To achieve the highest possible level of skill in the use of basic concepts, tools, techniques, and procedures to develop an electronic/electroacoustic music composition from concept to finished product. This involves the ability to work with various media, styles and forms, to use and develop notations when applicable, and to apply principles of scoring appropriate to particular compositions. (B.M.C.2.1.)

To achieve working knowledge of the technological developments applicable to the student's area of specialization (B.M.5.2)

To gain successful opportunities to hear fully realized performances of one's original compositions in public presentations, with critical assessment. (B.M.C.2.3.)

To further develop one's listening skills and to expand one's vocabulary to better analyze, describe, critique, and produce sound and compositional elements (form, timbre, etc.)

National Association of Schools of Music Standards – Composition and Improvisation

Students must acquire:

1. Rudimentary capacity to create derivative or original music both extemporaneously and in written form when relevant.
2. The ability to compose, improvise, or both at a basic level in one or more musical languages, for example, the imitation of various musical styles, improvisation on pre-existing materials, the creation of original compositions, experimentation with various sound sources, and manipulating the common elements in non-traditional ways.

Creative Goal

A major purpose of this standard is to encourage the development of rudimentary skill and greater insight into creative and communicative processes of music through the formulation of musical ideas in purely musical terms. While gaining fundamental technical proficiency in composition and improvisation is

important to reaching this goal, the primary intent of the standard is to help all musicians gain technical means to reach individual creative ends.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

Collins, Nick, and Escrivan Rincón Julio D' *The Cambridge Companion to Electronic Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Owsinski, Bobby. *The Mixing Engineer's Handbook*. Boston: Course Technology, 2014.

Headphones – ideally over-ear with full frequency response (20Hz–20kHz) and stereo mini (1/8”) plug (or adapter)

USB drive (2 GB+) for storing your class files. **Please back up your files on another disk, so you have two copies at any given time.**

Software used in this course:

Reaper 5.12 (Mac/PC) – free 60 day trial (that continues longer) or \$60 for a non-commercial license

Audacity (Mac/PC) – Free

Spear – Free

Soundhack – Free

Other electronic music software, should you wish to try it later:

ProTools First — Free (lite version lacking some functionality)

ProTools 12 — \$599 + iLok (\$40)

Logic Pro X — \$199

Max/MSP — \$250 (or \$59 per year)

PureData — Free

Ableton Live — \$499+

POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to be prepared to present work when scheduled to do so and to submit assignments in a timely manner. **Each unexcused absence will result in a 5% reduction in one's highest attainable final grade.** Absences will be excused in cases of illness (with doctor's note) or legitimate emergency (family or otherwise). **No late assignments will be accepted;** please notify me in advance to request an extension in case of extenuating circumstances. Sleeping in class and/or being noticeably distracted by personal electronics or your computer during lecture, listening, or discussion will result in an unexcused absence for the day.

Workshopping – Students will be expected to discuss with the class their process, intent, and compositional decisions in detail, as well as larger concepts and ideas that may inform their work. As we strive to create an open forum where everyone feels comfortable enough to foster beneficial critique, everyone will be expected to participate in the respectful delivery of constructive criticism. There will be no disclaiming allowed from presenters – care about your work, stand behind your ideas, and don't be afraid to take artistic risks.

Additional reading and **Listening** assignments will be posted on the course website (URL above). Students are expected to be prepared to discuss the readings and recordings in class and may be asked to write short response papers or to lead discussion on a particular topic or piece.

Quizzes – There will be periodic quizzes on terms, historical events, and technical topics with matching and short answer questions. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of the class period and can only be made up in the case of extenuating circumstances if discussed with me in advance. There will not be specific listening examples to identify, but students may be played audio examples and asked to describe and identify particular techniques being used.

AVERT DISASTER! Backup, backup, backup! Always keep at least 2 updated copies of your files. This is a public computer lab and the hard drives are reformatted upon logging off. Please bring a USB drive to class each week to save your files and **back them up in a second location after each and every session** to avoid calamity.

GRADING

- In-class participation: 20% – 5% will be deducted from final grade for each unexcused absence
- Quizzes: 20%
- Short written/listening/lab assignments: 15%
- Paper (and presentation, for graduate students): 20%
- Final Project: 25%

Each item of **written work** will be graded on a scale of 100 points. Each item will then be adjusted according to the percentage that it counts toward the final semester grade (see above). After I have calculated the number of points (adjusted for the above percentages), I will add all of them together and translate the grand total into your final letter-grade for the course, using the standard scale: A 93-100, A- 90-92, B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82, C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72, D+ 65-69, D 60-64, F less than 60.

Creative work will be graded individually, taking into account each student's level of experience with composition and technology. Students are given full stylistic and creative control over the music they write and the quality of their work will be determined by (1) mastery of tools and techniques used, (2) demonstration of considerable effort/personal investment in the work and/or attention to detail, (3) openness to try new things based on recommendations from the class or the instructor. Quantity of work may vary based on the projects at hand and one's individual creative process, but must reflect a consistent and reasonable effort.

How to get an A:

Do your best work and complete it on time. Come to class prepared and remain engaged during lecture, discussion, listening, and workshoping. Be open to new ideas and consider suggestions made by others. Avoid making value judgments ("good/bad") when discussing art; focus on what you find effective or not and explain why and/or how. Do the reading, take lecture notes, and study for the quizzes.

UNIVERSITY ANTI-BIAS STATEMENT

Each member of the University community has the responsibility to foster an environment of acceptance, mutual respect, and understanding. If you are a target or a witness of a bias incident, you are encouraged to contact the URI Bias Response Team (www.uri.edu/student_life/brt) where you will find people and resources to help.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Please inform the instructor should you have any physical or learning disabilities or other special needs so that the appropriate assistance may be offered.

PLAGIARISM / CHEATING

If you are found to have committed plagiarism or are caught cheating on a quiz, you will immediately receive a score of zero (0) for the assignment. Please cite all of your sources properly with footnotes and bibliography – Chicago Style preferred, but MLA and ALA citations will also be accepted.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Assignments are due the date under which they appear.

JAN 29: INTRODUCTIONS – DEFINITIONS – BASICS OF SOUND AND EDITING

Read: Toiviainen, “The Psychology of Electronic Music” from *Cambridge Companion...* and Owsinski, Chapter 11 “Clean-up” (pg. 125–132)

FEB 5: CLASS BEGINS AT 11 AM – LISTENING PARTY + WORK TIME

Present: Post a recording whose production you find especially interesting to the blog along with a short description of the details you find especially exciting or effective in terms of enriching the composition of the piece (include timestamps when relevant). Present a few ideas so the class knows what to listen for, play the piece, and lead a more detailed discussion about the work.

Read: Owsinski, Chapters 2 and 4

FEB 12: BEGINNINGS – DUBBING / TIME COMPRESSION + EXPANSION / REVERSE

– LAB 1 DUE –

Read: Hugill, “The Origins of Electronic Music” from *Cambridge Companion...*

Listen: Clara Rockmore – *The Swan*; Olivier Messiaen – *Feuillets inédits*; Thomas Bloch – *Formule* (1995), Les Paul & Mary Ford – *How High the Moon* (1951)

FEB 19: MUSIQUE CONCRÈTE – RECORDING / MICROPHONES – SPACE / PANNING

– QUIZ 1 – LAB 2 DUE –

Read: Schedel, “Electronic Music and the Studio” from *Cambridge Companion...* and Owsinski, Ch. 6 and 8

Listen: Pierre Schaeffer – *Étude de Chemins de Fer* (1948), Cage – *Williams Mix* (1952), Otto Luening – *Low Speed* (1952), Vladimir Ussachevsky – *Sonic Contours* (1952), Edgar Varèse – *Poème électronique* (1958)

FEB 26: SYNTHESIS / MODULATION / FILTERING

Read: Collins, “Live Electronic Music” and Owsinski, Chapter 7 (review chapter 8, pg. 90–92 modulation)

Listen: Karlheinz Stockhausen – *Gesang der Jünglinge* (1956), Milton Babbitt – *Philomel* (1964), Pauline Oliveros – *Bye Bye Butterfly* (1965), Steve Reich – *Violin Phase* (1967), Alvin Lucier – *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969)

MAR 4: COMPUTER MUSIC – COMPRESSION / LIMITING / GATING

– QUIZ 2 – LAB 3 DUE –

Read: Wang, “A History of Programming and Music” and Owsinski, Chapter 9

Listen: Max Mathews – *Daisy Bell* (1961); Jonathan Harvey – *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco* (1980), Paul Lansky – *Notjustmoreidlechatter* (1988); Trevor Wishart – *Tongues of Fire* (1994)

MAR 11: SYNTHESIZERS – CONVOLUTION / GRANULAR SYNTHESIS / FFT

– FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE

Read: Serafin, “Computer Generation and Manipulation of Sounds” and Chadabe Ch. 6 (handout)

Listen: Wendy Carlos – *Switched-On Bach* (1968), Laurie Spiegel – *Appalachian Grove* (1974), Herbie Hancock – *Rockit* (1983), Frank Zappa – *Worms from Hell* (1987)

MAR 18: MIDI – SHOW AND TELL

– QUIZ 3 – LAB 4 DUE

Read: Chadabe, Ch. 7 (handout)

Present: Post a recording whose production you find especially interesting to the blog along with a short description of the details you find especially exciting or effective in terms of enriching the composition of the piece (include timestamps when relevant). Present a few ideas so the class knows what to listen for, play the piece, and lead a more detailed discussion about the work.

MAR 25: SPRING BREAK!

MAR 28: MAX/MSP and LIVE ELECTRONICS – ALGORITHMIC COMPOSITION – NEW MEDIA

Read: Jordà, “Interactivity and Live Computer Music” and Essl, “Algorithmic Composition”

Listen: Benjamin Broening – *Arioso/Doubles* (2003); Doug Geers – *Turnstile*; Victor Gama – *SOL(t)O* (2007)

APR 1: Project checks

APR 8: Project checks

APR 15: Project checks

APR 22: Project checks

APR 29: Final project checks / **Draft of paper due (optional)**

MAY 3: FINAL PROJECT DUE via email by 5:00 pm (entire project folder + performance materials)

MAY 4: Class Concert – set-up begins at 5 pm, concert begins at 7 pm, FREE

MAY 9: FINAL PAPER DUE via email by 11:59 PM

ASSIGNMENTS

Labs and **short written responses** will be assigned the week before they are due. A final stereo version of lab compositions must be posted to the blog before the start of class the day they are due.

Quizzes and Creative Work

See description under policies and expectations above.

Final Paper (due May 9 at 11:59 pm via email)

3–5 pages, 12 pt. double-spaced font, 1” margins, with citations as needed and links to pertinent recordings

OPTION 1: Create a transcription of a recording/piece of your choosing (pending approval by instructor) and write an analysis discussing specific techniques, stylistic traits, and other relevant musical or non-musical factors that you feel have influenced the piece.

OPTION 2: Choose a sub-genre of electronic music and provide a detailed overview of representative practitioners within it; specific works they have created; the characteristics that define the sub-genre; and any relevant influences you consider have had or will have an effect on its development and how.

Final Project

Create an extended, polished composition to be performed on our class concert. Suitable length will be determined by the type of material being used (a three minute dense point-source piece may take as much time and effort as a 20 minute ambient/textural piece). Attention to detail and quality of craft, both compositionally and technically will be taken into consideration. A final, bounced down, high quality .AIFF or .WAV file, labeled appropriately (Name, Title, Course Number, Semester and Year, Sample Rate), and a .zip file of the entire Reaper session folder, will be due **May 3 at 5 pm** via email.

FINAL CLASS CONCERT: Wednesday, May 4, 2012 at 7 pm (Set-up at 5 pm)

In place of a final exam, all students are required to present a finished piece or a completed excerpt of a work in progress at the final class concert. Students will be responsible for setting up and running tech at the concert, recruiting performers and scheduling/participating in rehearsals, if needed, writing program notes and a short biography, creating a poster, and helping to publicize the event.