PA 48R MUSIC AND HUMANITIES

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SUMMER 2026
TTTWWW 789456
ROOM: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines music as a phenomenon at the intersection of biology, cognition, experience, and culture. Moving from sound perception to identity, culture, memory, and emotion, the course integrates findings from music psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology with key perspectives from the humanities and social sciences.

Students explore how music is processed by the brain, how it shapes lived experience, and how it functions within ritual, social bonding, political economy, and aesthetic life. Scientific explanations of musical perception are paired with philosophical, anthropological, and cultural theories that illuminate music's role in meaning-making and human self-understanding.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By completing this course, students will be able to:

- Compare scientific and humanistic approaches to understanding music.
- Explain the basic cognitive and biological mechanisms involved in musical perception.
- Analyze case studies of neurological and psychological responses to music.
- Relate musical experience to broader humanistic themes such as identity, ritual, transcendence, and aesthetics.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Levitin, Daniel J. *This Is Your Brain on Music*. 2006.

Sacks, Oliver. *Musicophilia*. 2007.

Berger, Harris M. *Stance*. 2009.

Small, Christopher. *Musicking*. 1998.

Attali, Jacques. *Noise.* 1985 (1977).

FURTHER READINGS

Deutsch, Diana, ed. *The Psychology of Music*. 2013.

Hodges and Sebald. *Music in the Human Experience: An Introduction to Music Psychology.* 2011

Purves, Dale et al. *Music as Biology*. 2017.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This is a reading-intensive course, and students are expected to engage closely with the assigned texts. For each reading, you must write a short response paper (about 500 words) that briefly summarizes the main ideas and includes your own reflections, questions, or comments. These papers will help you participate in class discussions and will also support your preparation for the final essay by building your understanding over time. Attendance is also essential for success in this course; regular participation in class will directly affect your overall grade.

ASSESSMENT

20% Response papers

30% Midterm exam

50% Final exam

WEEKLY READINGS SCHEDULE

Week 0 - Wed - JUN 24 - 12:00 — INTRODUCTION (online)

Week 1.1 - Tue - JUNE 30 - 15:00 — Music between sciences and humanities

Tkaczyk, Viktoria. (2023). "Introduction: Disciplining Auditory Cognition." *In Thinking with Sound: A New Program in the Sciences and Humanities around 1900*, 1–14. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cross, I. (2023). Sharing uncertainty: Music in humanistic and scientific understandings. *Musicae Scientiae*, 28(2), 222-236.

Week 1.2- Wed - JULY 1 - 12:00 — Sound & Perception (Pitch and Timbre)

Levitin, Ch. 1: What Is Music? From Pitch to Timbre

Sacks, Ch. 1: A Bolt from the Blue

Week 2.1 - **Tue - JULY 7 - 15:00 — Rhythm & the Body**

Levitin, Ch. 2: Foot Tapping: Discerning Rhythm, Loudness, and Harmony

Sacks, Ch. 19: Keeping Time: Rhythm and Movement

Week 2.2 - **Wed** - **JULY 8 - 12:00 — How the Musical Brain Works**

Levitin, Ch. 3: Behind the Curtain: Music and the Mind Machine

Sacks, Ch. 3: Fear of Music: Musicogenic Epilepsy

Week 3.1 - Tue - JULY 14 - 15:00 — HUMANITIES I

Berger, Harris M. Stance: Ideas about Emotion, Style, and Meaning for the Study of Expressive Culture. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009.

Week 3.2 - Wed - JULY 15 - 12:00 — Expectation & Prediction

Levitin, Ch. 4: Anticipation: What We Expect from Liszt (and Ludacris)

Sacks, Ch. 5: Brainworms, Sticky Music, and Catchy Tunes

Week 4.1 - **Tue** - **JULY 21 - 15:00 — Memory & Recognition**

Levitin, Ch. 5: You Know My Name, Look Up the Number: Memory and Music

Sacks, Ch. 15: In the Moment: Music and Amnesia

Week 4.2 - **Wed** - **JULY 22 - 12:00 — Emotion**

Levitin, Ch. 6: Music, Emotion, and the Brain

Sacks, Ch. 26: The Case of Harry S.: Music and Emotion

Week 5.1 - Tue - JULY 28 - 15:00 — HUMANITIES II

Small, Christopher. Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998.

Week 5.2 - **Wed** - **JULY 29 - 12:00 — Musical Ability & Expertise**

Levitin, Ch. 7: What Makes a Musician

Sacks, Ch. 7: Sense and Sensibility: A Range of Musicality

Week 6.1 - Tue - AUG 4 - 15:00 — Pleasure, Taste, Identity

Levitin, Ch. 8: My Favorite Things: Why Do We Like the Music We Like?

Sacks, Ch. 29: Music and Identiy: Dementia and Music Therapy

Week 6.2 - Wed - AUG 5 - 12:00 — Evolution & Human Nature

Levitin, Ch. 9: The Music Instinct: Evolution's #1 Hit

Sacks, Ch. 11: In Living Stereo: Why We Have Two Ears

Week 7.1 - Tue - AUG 11- 15:00 — HUMANITIES III

Attali, Jacques. Noise: The Political Economy of Music. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. (1977.)

Week 7.2 - Wed - AUG 12 - 12:00 — FINAL

Course review and final paper guidelines.