

Big Picture Questions, Music History III, Fall 2023 (other issues were also covered in class)

Week 1: Getting our Bearings.

- How do we access music that is new to us—who do we turn to for suggestions, tips, advice? How has this changed over the last 200 years? What changing roles has the “music critic” (whether Berlioz or Alex Ross) played in this story?
- What kinds of obsessions/exclusions does the story of the Pulitzer Prize tell us? What did the Pulitzer committee value (and who did it tend to exclude)? Do those kinds of values (notation, etc) often show up in traditional kinds of curriculum and programming as well?
- How do we “tell” history? Why is it inappropriate to think that there is a single narrative of history that is the “right” way to write history?
- While we don’t want to get too worried about memorizing dates, what does learning chronology help us do? If we were going to create our own musical timeline of the 20th and 21st centuries, what would we include?

Week 2: 21st Century Sounds.

- Stylistic Borrowings—incorporating music styles from times and places other than your own. And what are the potential issues that come to the forefront when you borrow from cultures other than your own?

Week 3: Music & Screen Media

- How has music accompanied moving images—film, in this case—from the 1920s through today? What are some distinct historical phases of music for movies?
- exploring film scoring practices through issues such as gender, race, nostalgia, unity, etc
- video game music histories and conventions—and how does music from the past reappear in these kinds of situations?

Week 4: The Turn of the 20th Century.

- Remembering the 19th century: The formation of the canon (how do you compete with the dead on a concert program?); Absolute vs. program music; Nationalism
- How can musical form or content mean something extramusical? Or is it even possible? [we discussed this through Chaminade, Joplin, and Debussy]
- Do we always value music that is “innovative”? Or are there other things that are just as important to us? And what kinds of musical “innovations” tend to be most frequently discussed?

Week 5: Humor and Satire

- Why do we care?
 - humor is important to most people, and is a really essential part of human expression—humorous and comedic aspects always been part of music, across many different styles/genres/places/time periods.
 - In totalitarian regimes it is even a strategy for survival, since it belongs to those sides of life that the authorities have never succeeded in completely controlling—in addition to love, art, and sexuality.

- How have composers, performers, and audiences used humor in music? What does humor in music accomplish?
 - satirical/social criticism
 - enhances the aesthetic appeal of the work/increasing the enjoyment of listening
 - creation of in-groups/out-groups
 - can help discharge emotional energy

Week 6 and 7: Music and Place

- How can we connect music to place? [and why would we want to do so?]
- How does music move, across borders, via media? How does this change over time?
- How do we talk about [and why do we care?] about musicians and their movements?
- How does thinking about movement/mobility change some of our ideas about nationalism or audience reception?

Weeks 8 and 9: Music and Narrative

- Most operas and musicals tell stories (duh, right?) They’re sung forms of drama....But who or what is telling these stories [and who is listening or interpreting them?] And how does the music itself get involved?
- Is the orchestra taking on a narrator-like role?
- Does the instrumental music tell us something about a character’s inner thoughts and feelings?
 - An orchestra can also express a perspective that reveals aspects of character’s identities they themselves are not aware of (hidden identities, for example).
 - How else can the orchestra comment? By using music to contradict a character’s words
- Does the music [not the words, but the music] allow us to hear the perspectives or emotions of a specific character?

Weeks 10 and 11: Music & Politics

- How might music help enforce the rules, ideals, institutions of those in power? Can music help perpetuate a dominant culture?
- How might music help people challenge an existing power structure? Can music act as a form of resistance or social commentary? How?
- In what ways—besides lyrics—could music have a connection to politics or power?
- How have totalitarian states such as the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany attempted to use and control music? How does this change from the 1930s through the 1980s?
- How are particular places (such as domestic spaces or the recording studio) a place where power is negotiated?
- What are some various ways that music was deployed as a political tool during the 1950s and 1960s in connection with civil rights movements in the United States?

Weeks 12 & 13: Music and Dance.

- How has music connected with movement throughout history? (and since 1900 especially?)
- Is the music reflected in the movements or vice versa? Which comes first in collaborative projects? Do the dancers and choreographers always agree?
- Are there specific qualities which are found in music for dance?
- What is different about how we study musics of the past versus dances of the past? In terms of sources and challenges, are they the same or different?
- Does music originally meant for dance make its way into the concert hall? How does that change it?
- How does the body connect to both music and dance?
- How do we see anxieties arise about the use of the body in music and dance?
- gender? sexuality?
- the mixing and touching of bodies (prohibitions on racial mixing and sexual mixing often involve music and dance spaces!)

Week 14: Why Make Music Complicated or Lacking in Emotion?/ Experimenting with New Sounds.

- What has typically been meant by terms such as modernist, ultra-modernist, “avant-garde,” and experimental when referring to music?
- Why pursue this kind of music making? What’s in it for creators? What’s in it for audiences? Can it alienate audiences?
- What kinds of experimental musical techniques pop into our minds when we think of music of the past and music or today?
- What are “extended techniques”?
- Why would someone be interested in writing “complex” music? To annoy you! Okay, that is probably not the actual answer....what did we come up with in class?
- What are some of the ways that composers or creators have written complex or rigorous or systematic music in the 20th and 21st centuries?
- Why might someone want to write or create music that is anti-emotional? Because they’re a mean spirited goblin?....probably also not the actual reason..... what did we come up with in class?

Week 15: Technology and Beyond....

- What is technology? What kinds of things does this include?
- What are some of the ways that changing technologies have impacted music in the 20th and 21st centuries? What about earlier centuries? Do we think these things are fundamentally different in earlier centuries or has technological change always impacted music?
- How does technology impact the music you make and listen to today?