

Music of New York
Music-UA 100, Summer 2022 (4 credits)
Silver Center, Room 218
MTWTh, 11am–1:05pm
<https://brightspace.nyu.edu/d2l/home/203035>

Instructor: Brian Fairley (brian.fairley@nyu.edu)
Office Hours: Tuesday 2–4pm, or by appointment

Course Description

What does it mean to talk about a city’s music? New York, without a doubt, has been home to some of the most important and influential performers, venues, industries, and movements in modern music history. Yet it can be easy to forget the individual lives that lie at the root of this history, the countless moments of struggle, resistance, joy, and transcendence that fill the streets with sound. In a recent essay in the *New York Times Magazine*, Carina del Valle Schorske shows one way to approach this question. In poetic, perceptive language, she shows how life in New York City—depicted in the brief window of summer 2021, after widespread vaccination but before the Delta wave—can be observed and experienced through dance, with the rhythms, timbres, and lyrics of different songs leading the way.

In this six-week course, we will attend to a wide range of musical practices from the past and present, focusing especially on music as a lived, embodied experience. We will explore different modes of writing about music—journalism, personal essays, formal analyses, historical portraits—while also thinking creatively about audiovisual methods of documentation and storytelling. Short, weekly writing and listening assignments will culminate in a final presentation based on the observation of musical events happening in the city today. While readings and in-class discussions will cover prominent musical traditions from New York’s history—vaudeville and minstrelsy, Caribbean social dance styles, experimental jazz and composition, folk music from myriad immigrant communities—the final presentation can look at any musical genre or scene of the student’s choosing. We will also venture out into the city: attending performances, visiting libraries and archives, and meeting performers and writers. At a time of heightened awareness of physical space, social distance, and interpersonal interdependence, this course proposes music and movement as a lens through which to understand urban life as it is lived, both yesterday and today.

A Note on This Syllabus

This syllabus is an evolving document, which will be responsive to the changing needs of the class as the course progresses. Minor changes in readings, listening/watching assignments, or class topics, are likely to occur. Additional guests or field trips may also be added, necessitating adjustments elsewhere in the schedule. I will always communicate these changes in writing—by email—as early as possible. While this syllabus is still the best place to return to for the most important information on class policies, due dates, etc., I ask that you stay connected to class communication, and please don’t hesitate to write to me if you have any questions.

Course Schedule

Intro Week

- 7/7 First class meeting
Introductions, How do we talk/write/move/share about music? Course overview

Week 1 Modes and Genres of Music Writing

- 7/11 Chronicle & Concert Review
Reading: Hermes, “1976,” from *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire*, reviews by Virgil Thomson and Greg Tate
***Assignment due:* In-class sharing of music from the Hermes reading**
- 7/12 Oral History & Memoir
Reading: Goodman, *Meet Me in the Bathroom* (excerpt); Simone, *I Put a Spell on You* (excerpt); Oral histories on the Red Bull Music Academy site
- 7/13 Audiovisual methods
Watching: Demme, *Stop Making Sense* (available on Kanopy through NYU library)
Listening: “Not Just Me and Snakes” (episode of *Mogul* podcast on Spotify)
- 7/14 Meet on 7th floor of Bobst Library for tour of Avery Fisher Center
Ethnographic methods
Reading: Shelemay, *Let Jasmine Rain Down* (excerpt)
***Assignment due:* Description of proposed field site for Final Project (by 5pm)**

Week 2 Bodies on the Line: Ethnography, Social Movement

- 7/18 Social dance in time of pandemic, with guest Carina del Valle Schorske
Reading: Schorske, “[Dancing Through New York in a Summer of Joy and Grief](#)”
***Assignment due:* Questions for guest speaker (by start of class)**
- 7/19 Mambo, salsa, and other Caribbean sounds/steps
Reading: García, “Embodying Music/Disciplining Dance: The Mambo Body in Havana and New York City”
Optional event: [Salsa Social](#), Washington Square Park (5pm class)
- 7/20 Guest Performance TBD
- 7/21 Fire Island cassettes
Reading: Brown, “[Hidden in a Fire Island House, the Soundtrack of Love and Loss](#)”
***Assignment due:* Writing Assignment #1 (by 5pm Thursday)**

- Week 3 Black Performance: History and Representation**
- 7/25 Historical Background
Reading: Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (excerpts)
- 7/26 The Beauty of the Chorus
Reading: Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (excerpt)
- 7/27 **Field Trip to Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture**
Meet at 10:50 at Schomburg Center, 515 Malcolm X Boulevard (at W 135th)
- 7/28 Julius Hemphill and “Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin”
Listening: [Playlist of Julius Hemphill’s music for saxophone sextet](#)
Reading: Schatz, “A Blues Surrealist”
** *Assignment due:* Writing Assignment #2 (by 5pm Thursday)**
- Week 4 New York Experimentalism: Collaboration in Sound and Movement**
- 8/1 Cage & Cunningham, the divorce of music and movement
Reading: Alex Ross, “Searching for Silence”
Optional reading: Vaughan, “Merce Cunningham”
- 8/2 Glass, Wilson, Childs, minimalism and Judson Church
Reading: Novak, “Interview with Lucinda Childs”
NPR, [“The Minds Behind *Einstein on the Beach*”](#) (also can listen to the audio)
- 8/3 **Field Trip to the Lou Reed Exhibit, Public Library for the Performing Arts**
Meet at 10:50 at main steps to Lincoln Center Plaza, 1870 Columbus Ave
- 8/4 Mark Morris, the remarriage of music and movement
Reading: Damsholt, “Mark Morris, Mickey Mouse, and Choreomusical Polemic”
** *Assignment due:* Writing Assignment #3 (by 5pm Thursday)**
- Week 5 Nations within the City: Diaspora, Tradition, Folklore**
- 8/8 Roma weddings and other celebrations
Reading: Silverman, “Diasporic Ethnicity, Gender, and Dance”
- 8/9 Chinese-American musicians in New York
Reading: Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora* (excerpt)
- 8/10 Central Asian court music in Queens
Reading: Rapport, “American Music, Multiculturalism, and Bukharian Jews in Queens”
** *Assignment due:* “Beat of the Boroughs” (due by start of class)**

8/11 Visit from Nariman Asanov, director of the Crimean Tatar Ensemble of NY

Week 6 Conclusions & Final Presentations

8/15 TBD

8/16 Final Presentations, Day 1

8/17 Final Presentations, Day 2

****FINAL PROJECT DUE****, submitted via course website by 8pm

Course Materials and Website

There are no required texts to purchase for the class. All readings (as pdfs or as links to websites) will be posted on the course website, organized by week. Audiovisual assignments (listening, viewing) will also appear there—for instance, as links to NYU Library resources. Please let me know if you have any difficulty accessing these materials.

Assignments will also be posted on the course site, with instructions for submission. Other resources on the site include links to playlists, bibliographies, and a collaborative listing of musical events going on in the city. These listings may be helpful for you as you select a field site to observe for your Final Project.

Class Policies and Expectations

Thanks to its intensive schedule, this class covers a lot of material in only six weeks. Because we meet four days a week, I require less daily reading (~20–30pp) than I would if we met only once or twice a week. It is crucial that you arrive in class on time, having done the assigned reading/listening/viewing, and prepared to engage the material and your classmates.

Attendance is required at every class meeting and field trip. Please allow enough time for public transportation, especially when we are meeting somewhere off-campus. Any additional events taking place outside of class time will be optional. You can have two unexcused absences over the length of the course, after which your participation grade will be lowered. Tardiness of more than five minutes will count as an absence. While I appreciate a head's-up if you are running late, I will not be checking my email once the class period starts.

I anticipate and look forward to lively discussion of the topics covered in class, and I encourage you to ask questions and express your ideas with enthusiasm. A large part of my job is maintaining an atmosphere of respect and sensitivity, and I ask for your help in creating this environment. Any form of racist, sexist, classist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic, or similar language or behavior will not be tolerated. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me by email or in office hours if you have any concerns.

Some of the readings, especially primary sources from the past, may include language that is derogatory toward specific groups or individuals. Please refrain from repeating this language in class, or check with me if you have any doubt about a word or phrase's appropriateness.

Timeline of Due Dates

Details for each assignment will be given on the course website and/or as emails. Unless otherwise indicated, you will submit your assignments through the course website.

July 11	Listening assignment from Will Hermes's book, submitted by start of class
July 14	Short description of proposed field site, submitted by 5pm
July 18	Questions for guest speaker, submitted by start of class
July 21	Writing Assignment #1: Reading response, submitted me by 5pm
July 28	Writing Assignment #2: Ethnographic vignette, submitted by 5pm
August 4	Writing Assignment #3: Audiovisual dispatch, submitted/uploaded by 5pm
August 10	"Beat of the Boroughs" YouTube research, submitted by start of class
August 15-17	In-class presentations of Final Project research
August 17	Final Project, submitted by 8pm

Assessment

Final Project (incl. presentation)	40%
Writing Assignments	30%
Other Assignments	20%
Class Participation	10%

The Final Project will be a 5-7 page essay (min. 1300 words, 12-point, double-spaced), based on the student's observation of a live event involving music somewhere in the city. Students will also share their work as an informal in-class presentation (5-7 minutes), which should include some audiovisual documentation of the event (circumstances permitting). Full details on the final project and presentation will be given at the end of the first full week of classes.

The three Writing Assignments are designed to be cumulative, all leading, directly or indirectly, to the Final Project. Language from these assignments can be woven into the final project text—as long as it is your own work (see Academic Integrity statement below).

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic

accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating (*adapted from the website of the College of Arts & Science, <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html>*)

Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else's idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).

Student Wellness

In a large, complex community like NYU, it's vital to reach out to others, particularly those who are isolated or engaged in self-destructive activities. Student wellness (<https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-programs/student-wellness.html>) is the responsibility of all of us.

The NYU Wellness Exchange is the constellation of NYU's programs and services designed to address the overall health and mental health needs of its students. Students can access this service 24 hours a day, seven days a week - wellness.exchange@nyu.edu; (212) 443-9999. Students can call the Wellness Exchange hotline (212-443-9999) or the NYU Counseling Service (212-998-4780) to make an appointment for Single Session, Short-term, or Group counseling sessions.

Acknowledgement

All syllabuses rely on the prior work of teachers, colleagues, and students; much of the language here draws from the requirements of the College of Arts and Sciences, but it also gratefully builds on ideas from syllabuses by Fabian Beltran, Catherine Provenzano, and Martin Daughtry.