

Philosophy of Music

Philosophy 365, Fall 2021

Instructor: Dr. Max Bialek

Lecture: Tu 9–10:20am

Location: LOR-020

Email: mbialek@rutgers.edu

Office Hours: TBA

Office Hours Location: TBA

Course Description. “Concept of musical expression; music as language; music and drama; music and representation; the nature of the musical work.”

This course will have, at its heart, ontological questions about music: What is a musical work? What is a performance? What is the relationship between works and performances? These questions might sound dry, but, in trying to answer them, we will quickly find ourselves wanting to extend our attention to a variety of other questions that touch on how music is practiced and how it is experienced...

We might think that a musical performance should be faithful to the work being performed, but then where is there room for the interpretation of the performers? What counts as authentic in music and what is its value? How does music without lyrics (or even so much as a title) express ideas and make us feel things? How do recordings fit into our understanding of the relationship between musical works and performances? What's the difference between listening to a recording of improvisational music and listening to a repeat performance of it (if there is such a thing)? How do our answers to any of these questions change when we look to different musical traditions or genres?

In considering these questions we will constantly be seeking out music and musical things in order to apply and test the views being discussed.

Learning Goals. It is the goal of this course that students enrich their ability to engage with music. This enrichment occurs on two fronts: Individually, students will learn to reflect and draw on recent philosophical work on the nature of music, its practice, and its aesthetics, as well as be prepared to critically engage with other such works that they might encounter in the future. Interpersonally, students will learn to discuss their views—and the views of others—on music in ways that can be simultaneously critical, constructive, and respectful.

Course Materials. All readings and other material will be posted on the course's Canvas site or Perusall (which will be available via the Canvas site).

Course Website. The course website is done through Canvas, and will be available directly at <https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/135500>. It is expected that you turn on alerts for announcements made on the course site so that you can stay up-to-date on any changes to the course.

Contact Information. If you need to be in touch, please email the instructor at the email address listed above. Use your official Rutgers email address when you email the instructor—as a matter of FERPA compliance, there are many matters that cannot be discussed using personal email addresses. Do not use Canvas' Inbox system as it can be unreliable and you will be less likely to get a timely response.

Accessibility and Accommodations. Any needed accommodations or issues that might affect your academic performance should be brought to the attention of the instructor as soon as possible. Consult with the instructor or any of the following offices for help or more information:

- [Academic Advising](#)
- [Student Health and Counseling](#)
- [Office of Disability Services](#)
- [Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance](#)
- [Scarlet Listeners](#)

Student Conduct. You should make sure that you are familiar with the rules regarding proper academic conduct as detailed at the [Student Affairs' Academic Integrity website](#). Additional information regarding student conduct in general is available at the [Office of Student Conduct website](#). All discussions related to this course—in class, out of class, online, wherever and whenever—should be conducted respectfully and constructively in accordance with the [Department of Philosophy's statement on the norms of discourse](#).

Attendance and Participation. Attendance and regular participation during in-class discussions is required. If you expect to miss any classes, please use the University's [absence reporting website](#) to indicate the date(s) and reason(s) for your absence.

Regarding COVID-19. Everyone must wear a suitable mask during in-person meetings and anyone without a suitable mask will be asked to leave.

This and any other policies may be subject to change as guidance and rules relating to COVID-19 are revised.

Assessment. There are five major assessments in the course, each of which is worth 20% of the total course grade:

Presentation. Over the duration of the semester, each student will have to give an in-class presentation about a particular musical work that could serve as an interesting example when discussing course content.

Review Paper. There will be one highly structured literature review paper (1000-2000 words) worth 15% of the course grade.

Online Readings & Discussions. Each individual reading assignment will be available on Perusall, which offers a very nice platform for annotating and discussing the readings (more on Perusall below). While the exact schedule of readings is not yet finalized, there will be one or two readings each week (depending on their length and what else is happening that week) for an approximate total of 20–25 readings (over the 14 weeks of the semester). The four lowest scoring discussions will be dropped.

Discussion Paper. There will be one discussion paper (1500-3000 words) in which you present your own thinking on a course topic. Prior to writing the paper, a brief proposal (no more than 1000 words) must be prepared and approved by the instructor.

Final Exam. A final exam of short answer questions will be worth 20% of the course grade.

All grades will be given in numerical form. The course grade will be based on the weighted average described above, and the following scheme will be used to convert its numerical value to a letter grade:

$$A \geq 90 > B+ \geq 87 > B \geq 80 > C+ \geq 77 > C \geq 70 > D \geq 60 > F$$

After the total numerical course grade has been calculated, extra credit of up to 10 points may be awarded on the basis of constructive participation during live discussions and by considering the performance of a student on their highest scoring major assessment.

Please do not ask for additional extra credit.

Late Assignments. Late assignments may be submitted, but will have 5% of their maximum possible score deducted per day that they are late.

Discussions on Perusall, being collaborative, do demand a degree of timeliness. There is, however, ample opportunity to earn credit after the due date according to the following rules:

- You cannot earn more credit after the due date than what you earned before.
For example: If you did nothing prior to the due date, then you cannot earn any credit after the due date. If you would have received a 35 for the work done prior to the due date, then you would be able to earn at most another 35 points for work done after the due date (for a maximum assignment score of 70). You will be able to get full credit on the assignment as long as you do work corresponding to at least half credit prior to the due date.
- Replies to annotations will earn full credit for up to *one week* after the due date (except when such credit would conflict with the first rule). Replies unrelated to the original annotation will not be counted.
- New annotations can be made for credit up to four days after the due date (except when such credit would conflict with the first rule), but the credit earned is reduced in proportion to how late the annotation was made.

For example: A new annotation posted just an hour after the due date would be awarded 99% of the credit it would have earned prior to the due date (since it came 95 hours prior to end of the four-day/96-hour lateness window, and $95/96 \approx 0.99$). A new annotation posted exactly 24 hours after the due date would get 75% credit, exactly two day late would get half credit, and so on...

Perusall. Perusall is meant to help you learn faster by collaboratively annotating the readings and communicating with your classmates. Collaboration gets you help whenever you need it, makes learning more fun, enables you to help others (which research shows is also a great way for you to learn), and helps your instructor improve the course by emphasizing information that you need.

If you have a question or information to share about a passage in the readings, highlight the text and type in a comment as an annotation. You can also respond to a classmate's annotation in threads in real time or upvote questions you find helpful. Good annotations contribute to the class by stimulating discussion, explaining your thought processes, helping others, and drawing attention to good points. (I strongly encourage you to look at [these examples](#) and to pay special attention to what is said about the “meets expectations”/“improvement needed”/“deficient” ratings.) If a particular classmate's point is relevant, you can explicitly @/mention them and they will be immediately notified, even if not presently signed on—you can even mention the instructor (“@Max Bialek”) if you'd like to specifically request their input on a discussion.

Research shows that the following behaviors on Perusall predict higher end-of-semester grades and long term mastery of material:

- Contributing thoughtful questions and comments to the class discussion, spread throughout the entire reading
- Starting the reading early
- Breaking the reading into chunks (instead of trying to do it all at once)
- Reading all the way to the end of the assigned reading
- Posing thoughtful questions and comments that elicit responses from classmates
- Answering questions from others
- Upvoting thoughtful questions and helpful answers

The extent to which you do these things will play a role in determining your score. Between them, there is over 100% of a full score to be earned, so you do not actually have to do any of them perfectly. The majority of the possible score that can be earned will be based on your five best annotations.

If you are concerned about your score on a particular assignment, you can contact the instructor for advice on where there is room for improvement.

Schedule. Below is a *tentative* list of readings for the course in alphabetical order. Not all of these readings are sure to appear on the final schedule, and there are certainly some readings to be added.

- Brown, L. B. (1996). Musical works, improvisation, and the principle of continuity. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 54(4), 353-369.
- Brown, L. B. (2000). "Feeling My Way": Jazz Improvisation and Its Vicissitudes: a Plea for Imperfection. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58(2), 113-123.
- Brown, L. B. (2000). Phonography, rock records, and the ontology of recorded music. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58(4), 361-372.
- Carroll, N. (1997). The ontology of mass art. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55(2), 187-199.
- Davies, D. (2011). The Nature of Artistic Performance. In *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Davies, D. (2011). Challenges to the Classical Paradigm in Music. In *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Fisher, J. A. (2018). Jazz and Musical Works: Hypnotized by the Wrong Model. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 76(2), 151-162.
- García-Carril Puy, N. (2019). The ontology of musical versions: Introducing the hypothesis of nested types. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 77(3), 241-254.
- Goehr, L. (1989). Being true to the work. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 47(1), 55-67.
- Gracyk, T. (1999). Valuing and evaluating popular music. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57(2), 205-220.
- Jamieson, D. (2018). Hollow Sounds: Toward a Zen-Derived Aesthetics of Contemporary Music. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 76(3), 331-340.
- Jamieson, D. (2021). Field Recording and the Re-enchantment of the World: An Inter-cultural and Interdisciplinary Approach. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 79(2), 213-226.
- Judkins, J. (2011). Silence, sound, noise, and music. In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Routledge.
- Kania, A. (2006). Making tracks: The ontology of rock music. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 64(4), 401-414.
- Kania, A. (2011). Definition. In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Routledge.
- Leddington, J. (2021). Sonic Pictures. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.

- London, J. (2021). Two Kinds of “Bad” Musical Performance: Musical and Moral Mistakes. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.
- Matravers, D. (2010). Recent philosophical work on the connection between music and the emotions. *Music Analysis*, 29(1-3), 8-18.
- Raffman, D. (1988). Toward a cognitive theory of musical ineffability. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 685-706.
- Risser, R. E. (2018). Qur’anic Recitation and The Aesthetics of Piety. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 76(3), 309-318.
- Sizer, L. (2019). Sad Songs Say So Much: The Paradoxical Pleasures of Sad Music. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 77(3), 255-266.