

MSC 1003 - Music in Civilization

Spring 2021

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conducted fully online

at davesmey.com

Welcome to Music in Civilization! The title of this course is a bit of a misnomer, because it focuses almost exclusively on *Classical* music in *Western* civilization. (Back in the day such a class used to be called “Music Appreciation,” which was perhaps equally misleading.) By the end of this class you should be able to hear any piece of Classical music and have an idea of when it was written, who it was originally written for, how it is put together, and basically what the whole point of it is. For some people this makes the world of artsy concert music less intimidating and more enjoyable – hopefully it will do that for you as well.

The course catalog also promises some discussion of non-Western music. In this class the non-Classical component will be a unit on the African-American tradition of jazz, which we will understand as a combination of European and African influences.

The Class Website

For Spring 2021 this class will be fully online and “asynchronous,” meaning that you will have flexibility to do work on your own schedule. All class materials and assignments will be posted on my personal web space, davesmey.com. (It also has an alternate address, musicinciv.com, in case you find that easier to remember.)

Our two sections do have a scheduled time on Mondays and Wednesdays (either at 12:50pm or 2:30pm) and I will offer some zoom sessions during these timeslots. However, these sessions are completely *optional* – they are intended for discussion, review, and support. You can attend a session in any time slot, not just your assigned section.

The main content of the class will be posted on our web site in a blog-like format on Mondays and Wednesdays, following the standard academic calendar. (We’ll still take all of the standard school holidays off.) Official posting time will be around 1:00 pm, though if I am finished with the material early I’ll try to put it up before then.

(Once we get started you’ll also see that new homework is typically due 2 weeks in the future. The deadline for homework will be 11:59pm on the due date.)

Basically my goal is to take everything I used to do in person and turn it into an assignment. Each little unit should take around 10-20 minutes if you do it carefully, and the goal is to assign about an hour-and-a-quarter’s worth of stuff for each class (just like it would have been in

person.) However, the amount of work per class will naturally fluctuate – some classes are short, and certain units and projects will take longer than one class to complete.

Our class website is built by me and coded “by hand.” I apologize in advance for any errors I might make, and ask that you contact me by email if you observe any problems.

What do you need for this class?

You don’t actually have to buy anything to take this class. However, I can think of three things you might want to spend money on which would enhance your enjoyment of it.

1) A good pair of earphones or headphones.

Since the point of the class is to listen to music, you want a setup that will make the music sound as good as possible. I do not recommend holding your cellphone up to your ear or playing the music on your laptop speakers – instead you probably want something more than that! I have [a page on the website](#) that suggests some inexpensive options for headphones, bluetooth speakers et cetera.

2) A student subscription to Youtube Premium, Spotify, or Apple Music.

In order to listen we’ll frequently use these three popular streaming options. I use youtube the most, and I try to offer alternate links to Spotify and Apple Music when I can. These services offer discounted student subscriptions that would make your streaming experience ad-free. I recommend picking one of them and subscribing.

3) An optional textbook, *Listening to Western Music* by Craig Wright.

This class used to be based on a textbook, so if you like to read (or are suffering from “screen fatigue”) I would still recommend picking up an inexpensive used copy. You will see that the text still follows the sequence of the class fairly closely, and it will add some depth and detail to what we are talking about. Craig Wright teaches full-time at Yale, and I’m just an adjunct at Baruch, so that would suggest that he’s smarter than me. :)

There are actually four different versions of the text that you could get, depending on what you can find on the used market. You can purchase *Listening to Music* or *Listening to Western Music*, in either the seventh or eighth editions. I have [an online guide](#) which could help you locate a cheap copy.

Optional Zooms and Office Hours

CUNY still requires that adjunct professors offer “office hours” for online courses. This is a somewhat outdated concept, in my opinion, but I will offer a few different opportunities for enhanced contact.

As I mentioned above, I will offer optional zooms at various points in the semester. Some of these will be scheduled in our official class time slots (12:50 and 2:30), and additional sessions will be offered at other times! You do not have to tune in to your section’s time slot, you can attend any session.

On the class website there is a link called “Office Hours” which will list upcoming zooms that you can sign up for.

You can also always email me at david.smey@baruch.cuny.edu and I’ll try my best to answer your questions. We can make additional appointments to interact one-on-one via phone, skype, zoom etc. if you like.

Grading

Homework: 75% of grade

Over the course of the semester there will be a lot of brief assignments that you will complete through our class website (davesmey.com). I would guess that there might be 50-60 of them in total. At the end of the semester your overall web homework average will be at least 75% of the final grade.

Completing a homework assignment will earn you one of three grades - “check plus,” “check,” or “check minus.”

Check plus – This is worth 100 points. It means you did excellent work. For each assignment, I decide what that means. I might only give a check plus for perfect work on one assignment, and then give check pluses out for 50% correct answers on the next assignment. The first screen on each homework assignment tells you what the grading criteria will be.

Your work also has to be on time for it to be a check plus.

Check – This means “pretty good.” It is worth 88 points. This is also the best grade you can possibly get on late work.

Check minus – This is unacceptable work. It is worth a 60. That’s a really bad grade, so I usually give you a second chance on check minuses.

Re-dos – After you get a check minus on an assignment, you’ll have an opportunity for one redo. Sometimes the assignment is programmed to let you try again immediately, and sometimes it makes you wait for a 24-hour lock-out period. If you do an acceptable job the second time around you can get upgraded to a check. Be careful, though – if you don’t meet the criteria on your second try you’ll get a *permanent check minus* which is even lower (40 points.)

Remember that re-dos are only for check minuses. You can’t redo a check.

Zeros – If you don’t do an assignment it factors a zero into your homework average. This does major, unnecessary damage to your grade! Since I do accept late homework there really is no reason not to take a few minutes to click through each exercise and get a grade – even a 60 is much better than a 0.

You can pause at any time. The assignments are not timed and you are allowed to stop and close the page after you’ve started. Just start again at the beginning, later – it will remember the answers you’ve already entered and you’ll be able to find the place where you left off.

Other assignments: 25% of the grade?

The web-based assignments are all multiple-choice, which is usually considered unacceptably simplistic for college-level work. Thus, we will also try to do a few assignments that require a little more depth and creativity. These will mostly be short writing assignments, plus one “special project” that is a little more involved.

My current plan is to have four of these in the semester, though we will see how many I can develop. If we don’t do enough of them I may shrink this percentage (and expand the role of “dumb” homework.)

Happily, there will be no tests in the traditional sense, no midterm and no final.

Late homework and procrastination

Most students say that they like the flexible design of this course, in which you have a lot of freedom to do homework when it is convenient. However, for some students, this is actually a handicap, because they put off the work for a long time and it builds up into a giant, overwhelming pile.

The smart strategy is obviously to keep up with the work and do it soon after it is assigned.

Some extreme procrastinators try to cram the entire course into a few days at the end of the semester. This is not what I want to see – you really aren’t going to learn much by doing it this

way, and students who put off work for this long also tend to also have dishonest strategies for completing the assignments. Thus, I am going to have a **procrastinator's rule**.

We will have two deadlines at the end of the semester. Our last class will be on Monday, May 17 – you must have 50% of the web assignments plus two “special assignments” complete by midnight on this date! If you do not, you will not be allowed to continue working.

The final, absolute deadline for all work will be a week later, on Monday, May 24.

If something bad happens

We are still in the midst of an international pandemic, and of course there are many other things that can happen that may disrupt your ability to complete this course as scheduled. If you are having a hard time meeting deadlines due to some extraordinary event I urge you to contact me, and we will work together to help you succeed.

Note, however, that this works much better if you contact me early, before things get completely out of control. I can't do anything for you after the semester is over.

Cheating (and “Cutting Corners”)

I would say that most Baruch students seem like very smart, hard-working, and honest people. However, occasionally I meet students who are dishonest, and this is a problem. Unfortunately our most famous graduate in the last decade is [Martin Shkreli](#), who is currently in prison for falsifying his hedge fund portfolio statements. Laziness and dishonesty reflect poorly on all of us at Baruch!

Our online assignments should mostly be short and easy. I would strongly encourage you to relax and do them the way they were intended to be done, by reading and viewing the online materials first and basing your answers on that. Don't look for shortcuts! I have a lot of little tricks that are designed to make workarounds less convenient than just doing things properly.

If I don't think your work is based on a legitimate viewing of the class materials I may lower your grades or deny you credit.

Abusing the website by accessing a classmate's account, lending someone your own account, or creating a fake persona is not OK and may result in an F for the semester. Your account is for your own use only.

Plagiarizing your “special assignments” will hurt your grade. In general I expect written work to represent your own thoughts and your own words – I am not interested in material that is copied from another source. If you feel the need to do internet-based research I expect you to

carefully integrate the outside information into your own work and cite it with footnotes or endnotes.

Asking someone else to do your work for you is also not OK, and may result in an F for the semester. This is particularly true if you *pay* someone to do your work. Unfortunately, with the rise of online education we've also seen the influence of "homework help" sites like [chegg.com](https://www.chegg.com). These sites offer a service that is technically legal but not acceptable in a college environment (since they don't actually teach you anything, they just do your work for you, and the quality of the answers they sell is often very poor.) In Spring 2020 I had to flunk three students for using chegg – don't let it happen to you.

Remember that if you find yourself stuck on an assignment, you can always ask me for help. You can also work together with your classmates as long as you actually help each other understand the material.

Harassment – of course it is never OK to bully or harass your classmates (or me) online or in-person. Rude, disruptive, or harassing behavior can affect your grade or even get you removed from class.

OK, that's it!

I hope this class is a relatively bright spot for you in this somewhat dreary online semester.