

**Syllabus**  
**Music 87 – Freshman Seminar**  
**Musical Communication**  
**University of California, San Diego**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Mandeville Room 127**

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**Program Description**

The Freshman Seminar Program is designed to provide students with the opportunity to explore an intellectual topic with a faculty member in a small seminar setting.

**Course Summary**

An investigation of how people use music to communicate with one another and why they do so, drawing on contemporary work in the cognitive, developmental, and social psychologies of music.

**Grading**

The grading for this course is done exclusively on a Pass/Not Pass basis. To earn a passing grade, you will be expected to attend all four meetings of the seminar, do the outside reading assignments, participate actively in class discussions, and make a short final presentation to the class by leading discussion on some original research relating to the course. Some guidelines for this presentation follow.

**Readings**

All readings are available as a single pdf file online at [reserves.ucsd.edu](http://reserves.ucsd.edu). Please search under my last name. They are excerpts from the book *Musical Communication* (Oxford University Press, 2005) edited by David J. Hargreaves, Raymond MacDonald and Dorothy Miell.

**Class Schedule**

**Tuesday, May 6 - 1-2:50 Introduction to the Study of Musical Communication**

**Tuesday, May 13 - 1-2:50 The Nature and Value of Music: A Perspective from Biology**

*READ: Chp. 2 (pp.27-43) "Music and Meaning, Ambiguity and Evolution" by Ian Cross*

**Tuesday, May 20 – 1-2:50 How Do People Communicate Using Music: A View from Psychology**

*READ: Chp. 1 (pp.1-26) "How Do People Communicate Using Music" by the editors*

**Tuesday, May 27 – 1-2:50**

*Student final presentations*

## **Class Presentations**

Each student should come prepared to the final class to present some additional work related to the course that might inspire additional group discussion and q&a. I am happy to discuss possible topics or to help with designing experiments, though some ideas follow. I will also entertain proposals to work in groups, though please clear this first with me.

I can envision several different types of final presentations:

One approach might be to research the details of a particular study/experiment (in either an article or a book) concerned with some dimension of musical communication. This could be something mentioned in class or in the readings that you investigate further or something that you encounter on your own. Some examples might include a study done with infants, or on bird or whale song, or on cross-cultural musical understandings, or on audio illusions, or something on music's therapeutic uses and benefits, or something aimed at understanding the neurological substrates involved with music perception or performance, etc.

Another approach could involve constructing one's own musical communication experiment, carrying it out with a group of friends, and analyzing/interpreting the results for the class. As a first year graduate student I created an experiment in which participants were played 10 or so excerpts of avant-garde improvised and avant-garde composed music and asked to respond to specific questions about the qualities of the music they heard (such as specific moments of tension or relaxation) and if they believed it to be improvised, composed, or some combination of the two, etc. Or even more fun, stop people on the street and ask them to sing their favorite song (or a well-known pop tune) entirely from memory and record their performance. Then check their versions against the original recording. How accurate was their sense of key/pitch? How close were they to the original tempo?

Lastly, one could bring in an example of music from one's own collection or something recently discovered that they feel illustrates well some aspect of the discussions/readings or that they can analyze to shed light on how (and even specifically when) the music may convey certain emotions to enculturated listeners or not convey them to those outside of the musical community.

Or come up with your own idea and approach. Have fun!!

## **Some Useful Starting Points:**

### Books:

*This is Your Brain on Music* by Daniel Levitin  
*The Singing Neanderthals* by Stephen Mithen  
*Sweet Anticipation* by David Huron  
*Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy* by Robert Jourdain

### Journals:

*Cognition* (2006, vol. 100)  
*Music Perception* (2005, vol. 23 no. 1)  
*The World of Music* 48(2) (2007)

### Online Resources:

Sound and Mind -- <http://soundandmind.amsteg.org/>