

Syllabus
Music 192 – Senior Seminar
Why Music? A Sociobiological Inquiry
University of California, San Diego
Winter 2007

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Program Description

The Senior 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

What is the evolutionary significance of music? Why do we make and experience it in such diverse ways around the globe? This seminar investigates the biological, neurological, and sociological dimensions of music, and the ways in which they are interrelated.

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.

Class Schedule (Please Note: All meetings take place in Mandeville 125. Readings are posted at reserves.ucsd.edu under my last name)

Tuesday, Jan 16 - 2-3:50

Why do we music?: Personal and cultural reflections

Tuesday, Jan 23 - 2-3:50

Why is there music?: An evolutionary perspective

- “Music and Meaning, Ambiguity and Evolution” by Ian Cross. Chp. 2 in *Musical Communication* (Oxford, 2005)
- “More than Cheesecake?: The Similarities and Differences between Music and Language” by Steven Mithen. Chp. 2 in *The Singing Neanderthals* (Orion, 2005)
- “Is Music an Evolutionary Adaptation?” by David Huron. Chp. 5 in *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music* (Oxford, 2003)

Tuesday, Jan 30 - 2-3:50

Why (or how) do we feel music? – a view from psychology and neuroscience

- “From Mimesis to Catharsis: Expression, Perception, and Induction of Emotion in Music” by Patrik N. Juslin. Chp. 5 in *Musical Communication* (Oxford, 2005)

Tuesday, Feb 7 – 2-3:50

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 concerned with the biological, sociological, or neurological dimensions of music (this could be something mentioned in the class readings that you investigate further or something you encounter on your own); for instance, 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 music cognition/perception 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/>