

MUS 559, Topics in Analysis: Spectral Music

Instructor: Daniel Weymouth

Tuesday, 4:10pm-7pm

“The search for expression through the material itself,” “chords of nature,” the construction of the natural.” these are all phrases that have been applied to Spectral Music. This is music where form can be elusive, and scores can be deceiving. At its best, it challenges many notions about what music is and how it functions. We will be looking at this music, trying to figure out—as with all analysis—what is being done, how is it being done, why is it being done, and is it working? To do this, we will consider issues of acoustics, resynthesis, psychoacoustics, aesthetics, and musical culture.

But we will always start with, and return to, the music. Analysis has two aspects, only the first of which is description. We go beyond description; we will consider why things happen in a piece — not why the composer did something, necessarily, but how an event fits within the internal logic the piece itself is suggesting. We will look at how events create form, and how form shapes the musical rhetoric of the piece. In so doing, we will think about the nature of analysis itself, and try to find tools appropriate to the job.

All students are welcome, but analytical experience is a prerequisite (MUS 502 and MUS 504 or the equivalent). There will be substantial listening and reading requirements, and weekly assignments (prose or analysis, as is fitting) — plan to spend 6-9 hours per week. Class projects will include one term paper and a project to be presented as a lecture (two different topics). In addition, the class will be run as a seminar; you will have a primary role in shaping the course direction, and will be expected to bring something “to the table” for every session.

This seminar is primarily intended for MA and PhD students. However, any MM or DMA students may enroll with permission from Prof. Weymouth. For students in the MA/PhD in Critical Music Studies track, it satisfies the Elective Group 3 requirement. For DMA students, it fulfills the Elective Group 2 requirement.

3 credits