

MUS 539, Proseminar in Ethnomusicology: Writing About Music-Ethnomusicology
Instructor: Benjamin Tausig | Thursday, 1pm – 3:50pm

The scholarly study of music has long reckoned with an intractable problem: how to describe music using the thrillingly flawed tools of the written word. Books, articles, dissertations, reviews, fieldnotes, and other forms of documentation and analysis in the field of ethnomusicology have favored text, sometimes by necessity and sometimes by sheer habit. In the resulting world of prose we find beauty, bathos, tedium and ample ideology.

This course moves through several hundred years of writing about music, from the fateful musical musings of explorer Mungo Park through the interior districts of Africa in the 18th century right through to YouTube comment threads. We will read and parse sentences, works, and whole genres of prose to understand what presumptions they carry, what possibilities they promise. We will look deep inside as well as quite far beyond the discipline of ethnomusicology to read words on music great and flawed, grandiose and self-effacingly scientific. And we will try our own hands at crafting rich representations with words, reading one another with care and generosity.

Coursework includes weekly readings and Brightspace postings, writing workshops, and a final paper (with formal presentation).

This course is primarily intended for MA and PhD students. However, interested MM or DMA students may enroll with permission from Professor Tausig. Interested MMs must also contact the Graduate Program Director. For DMA students, this course fulfills the Elective Group 1 requirement. For students in the MA/PhD in the Critical Music Studies track, it satisfies the Elective Group 1 requirement. MM and DMA students must check with their large ensemble instructor to see if this course would conflict with the ensemble's rehearsal schedule. If it will conflict, the student must check with the course instructor if absences for this reason would be permitted.

3 credits