MUET 5210 / 6010: SACRED SOUND
Music and Mystical Experience, Spiritual Expression, and Religious Communities

Instructor
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Course Overview
This course explores the intimate relationship between notions of the sacred and sounded practices in different cultural, spiritual, and performance contexts. Sounded practices may refer to public performances, private rituals, or even solitary contemplation. Throughout the semester, we will use case studies drawn from different religious and musical traditions to understand how music can facilitate or spiritual experience, artistic endeavors, and group identities.

The course is divided into roughly three areas of research, proceeding from internal to external:

1. Experience: How does music facilitate inner experiences of the sacred?
2. Expression: How is the sacred expressed through performance?
3. Community: How do sounded practices shape and maintain sacred communities?

Course Materials
All readings and assignments will be posted on Canvas. Students are responsible for regularly checking Canvas to ensure they are up to date with the material.

Evaluation
Your final grade will be based on the following criteria:

- Seminar Participation – 25%
- Weekly Reading Responses (Due by beginning of class) – 25%
- Ethnographic Report on Sacred Sound Community – 15%
- Final Project – 35%

COURSE INFORMATION

Attendance and Participation
Students are expected to attend class sessions, to come prepared and participate actively in all activities. Your presence in every class session is absolutely essential to your success in this course. Unexcused absences, consistent lateness, inattentiveness, or lack of participation may result in a grade penalty. Any student who accrues 3 unexcused absences will be asked to withdraw from the course. In case of a foreseeable absence, students should notify the instructor as soon as possible to arrange a way to make up for content or activities missed during a class session.
COVID-19 Attendance Statement

Academic excellence is important, but your health and wellbeing always take the first priority. If you are experiencing physical or mental health difficulties directly or indirectly related to the global pandemic that may interfere with your success in this course, please communicate with the instructor as soon as possible. In most cases, the instructor will do whatever is possible to determine appropriate accommodations to help you succeed in the class.

If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html) please seek medical attention from the Student Health and Wellness Center (940-565-2333 or askSHWC@unt.edu) or your health care provider PRIOR to coming to campus. UNT also requires you to contact the UNT COVID Hotline at 844-366-5892 or COVID@unt.edu for guidance on actions to take due to symptoms, pending or positive test results, or potential exposure. While attendance is an important part of succeeding in this class, your own health, and those of others in the community, is more important.

Course Outline

Part I: Introduction

Week 1 (January 20)

Topics: Introduction

Week 2 (January 27)

Topics: Thinking Globally about Music and Religion

Readings:


Part II: Experiencing the Sacred through Sound

Week 3 (February 3)

Topics: Mysticism – Toward a Theory of Sacred Experience

Readings:

- Khan, Hazrat Inayat. Selections from The Mysticism of Sound and Music.
Week 4 (February 10)

**Topics:** Music and Trance

**Readings:**

Week 5 (February 17)

**Topics:** Sacred Music and Emotion

**Readings:**
- Selections from the *Taitirriya Upanishad*.

**Part III: Expressing the Sacred through Sound**

Week 6 (February 24)

**Topics:** Religion as Art

**Readings:**
- Croce, Benedetto. 1909. Selections from *Aesthetic as a Science of Expression and General Linguistic*.

Week 7 (March 3)

**Topics:** The Sacred as Artistic Inspiration

**Readings:**
- Coltrane, John. 1965. Album notes from *A Love Supreme*.

Week 8 (March 10)

**Topics:** Students presenting Sacred Sound community ethnographies.

***SPRING BREAK***
Week 9 (March 24)

Topics: Performing the Sacred

Readings:

- Hagedorn, Katherine. 2006. “From This One Song Along, I Consider Him to be a Holy Man’: Ecstatic Religion, Musical Affect, and the Global Consumer.”

Part III: Sharing the Sacred through Sounded Communities

Week 10 (March 31)

Topics: Music and Religious Community Formation

Readings:


Week 11 (April 7)

Topics: Pilgrimage: Musical Journeys

Readings:


Week 12 (April 14)

Topics: Conflict and Activism

Readings:


**Week 13 (April 21)**

**Major concepts:** Music and Healing

**Readings:**

**Week 14 (April 28)**

**Topics:** Writing Workshop for Final Papers

**Week 15 (May 5)**

**Topics:** Student Final Project presentations

**Note**

In consideration of the unpredictable public health impacts of COVID-19, the instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus - including evaluation criteria - should circumstances necessitate. However, no changes that may impact students’ grades will be made without an open discussion with the class and consideration of all students’ perspectives and needs.

**Reading Responses**

Every week, students will submit written responses to the assigned readings before the beginning of class. These responses should demonstrate a detailed and nuance engagement with the content of each reading and attempt to synthesize its contributions with other ideas discussed in the course or in the students’ own research. Responses should contain, at a minimum:

1. A basic summary of the major ideas or arguments that may be drawn from the reading.
2. The students’ reflection or response to these ideas, which may include:
   a. Critique or refinement of the argument.
   b. Attempts to map the ideas to other musical or cultural contexts.
   c. Comparison to ideas or perspectives presented in other readings.
   d. Personal reactions to or reflections about the ideas.

**Sacred Sound Community Ethnography**

During the first half of the semester, each student will conduct a small-scale ethnography by visiting a sacred community (broadly defined) that uses sounded practices of some kind. The student will write a report about their experience, drawing from the concepts discussed in class and from broader music research. In Week 8, students will present their experiences during class time.
Final Project

All students will prepare an original research project related to a topic of their choice. The topic must be connected to the themes of the class, but may use a variety of forms of research (e.g. ethnographic, historical, comparative, analytical) depending on each student’s chosen topic and academic goals.

Papers will be due during the final week of class, on Thursday, May 5. During the final class period, each student will give a presentation based on their research.

Expected length: ~12-15 pages for MA students, 15-20 pages for PhD students

POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Statement of Religious Liberty

During class we will discuss texts from a variety of spiritual and religious traditions. We will also listen to and sing songs that may implicitly or explicitly refer to deities or other religious concepts. Our engagement with this music does not, of course, amount to a profession of any particular faith. Students are encouraged to take their own aesthetic or spiritual meanings from these pieces.

If however, your own religious beliefs – including beliefs in secular humanism or atheism – prohibit you from singing these words, please talk to me and we will work out an alternative.

Academic Integrity

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students, who may impose further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term “cheating” includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.  

https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.003.AcadIntegrity.Final_.pdf

ODA Statement

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter. You can now request your Letters of Accommodation ONLINE and ODA will mail your Letters of Accommodation to your instructors. You may wish to begin a private discussion with your professors regarding your specific needs in a course. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access.

See: disability.unt.edu. Phone: (940) 565-4323
Counseling and Testing

UNT’s Center for Counseling and Testing has an available counselor whose position includes 16 hours per week of dedicated service to students in the College of Music and the College of Visual Arts and Design. Please visit the Center’s website for further information: http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services.

For more information on mental health issues, please visit: https://speakout.unt.edu.

The counselor for music students is:
Myriam Reynolds
Chestnut Hall, Suite 311
(940) 565-2741
Myriam.reynolds@unt.edu

Add/Drop Policy

Please be reminded that dropping classes or failing to complete and pass registered hours may make you ineligible for financial aid. In addition, if you drop below half-time enrollment you may be required to begin paying back your student loans. After the 12th class day, students must first submit a completed “Request to Drop” form to the Registrar’s Office. The last day for a student to drop a class in Spring, 2021 is April 2. Information about add/drop may be found at: https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/spring-registration-guide

Student Resources

The University of North Texas has many resources available to students. For a complete list, go to: https://www.unt.edu/sites/default/files/resource_sheet.pdf