

Freshman Seminar

Music and Film

Enrollment limited to 12.

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Office hours: Tuesday 12-2pm or by appointment

This seminar is intended for students with an interest in movies and music. Some musical background is needed (e.g., in reading music, or playing an instrument), but students do not need to have advanced training in music theory. Because much film music can only be listened to, not studied in a score, we talk about music and sound on the basis of what we hear. If you know what an F-sharp minor chord is you will be fine.

Film Music is generally understood to mean as a score written to serve as background on the soundtrack. We'll be looking at film music in this sense. But we'll be going beyond it, to consider the ways in which music dictates continuity; how screenwriters and directors deal with music or musical performance as a narrative element; and how sound technology evolved.

Expectations about preparation: Before each seminar after Week 1, you should complete the readings and view the assigned film. The readings are available in the course packet. The films will be on reserve in the Music Library

Written work: A short (8-10) page essay concentrating on a particular problem in musical signification in film scores. Two film reviews, based on movies in release in the fall. You'll go to the movie, take notes in the theater, and write a ca. 1000-word account, concentrating on music and sound design. A final project. Here are some possibilities, and I am open to others:

Improvising, composing, or compiling a musical background for a silent film except, to be screened at a final project screening

Drawing upon film theory and criticism, to analyze a particular film

How have composers been represented (or misrepresented) in film biographies?

Opera on (and in) Film

Special screenings. Seeing a movie projected is a different experience from watching a DVD. So, on some Sunday nights we will arrange screenings with popcorn and surround sound.

TOPICS

Introductory Meeting

What music does to images; what images do to music. Basic sound theory concepts: Leitmotif, synchronization/counterpoint, diegetic/non-diegetic..

Viewing in seminar: excerpts from The Spy in Black (1939), Love in the Afternoon (1957), The Leopard (1963), Diva (1982).

Music and Sound in Silent Film.

[The attraction of silent film to music. Musical accompaniment]

Assigned film: The Student of Prague (1926)

Assigned reading: from Rick Altman, Silent Film Sound, Norman King, "The Sound of Silents," and Lotte Eisner, The Haunted Screen

Additional excerpts presented during the seminar: The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari (1920), The Phantom of the Opera (1925)

Early Sound Technology and Film

[Basic techniques of sound recording; the narrative role of music; first concepts of background scoring]

Assigned film: Dishonored (1931)

Assigned reading: TBA

Additional excerpts: The Jazz Singer (1927), The Blue Angel (1930), Grand Hotel (1932)

1930s operettas and musicals

[Filming to playback; the presence of music in the fiction]

Assigned film: Congress Dances (1932)

Assigned reading: from Krakauer, Offenbach and the Paris of His Time.

Additional excerpts: Die drei von der Tankstelle (1930), The Gay Divorcee (1933), The Wizard of Oz (1939)

Music as magic

[Non-diegetic music and montage/movement, music's physical and metaphysical agency]

Assigned film: Grand Illusion (1937)

Assigned reading: TBA

Additional excerpts: from I Know Where I'm Going (1946), The Ghost and Mrs. Muir (1947)

Classic Hollywood Soundtrack

Assigned Film: Mildred Pierce (1945)

Assigned reading: Caryl Flinn, "The New Romanticism: Hollywood Film Composition in the 1930s and 1940s"

Additional excerpts: from The Sea Hawk (1940), Laura (1944), Humoresque (1946)

Composed Film

Assigned film: Black Narcissus (1951)

Assigned reading: from Michael Powell, "A Life in Movies"

Additional viewing in seminar: from Alexander Nevsky (1938), The Tales of Hoffmann (1953)

Irony and Anempathy

Assigned Film: Eyes Without a Face (1959)

Assigned Reading: Claudia Gorbman, "Anempathy"

Additional excerpts: from), The Third Man (1949) 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

The Irrational and the Subconscious

Assigned film: Vertigo (1955)

Assigned reading: from Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror; Michel Choin, from Audio-Vision and Sound in Cinema

Additional excerpts: from Beauty and the Beast (1946), Spellbound (1945)