

ARTS 1010

Media Studio Audio/Video: Music

Course Syllabus: Fall 2009 (session two)

<http://www.arts.rpi.edu/rolnick/classes/MSMusic>

Lectures: Tuesdays 6–7:50pm, West Hall 211
Studio Section 3: Thursday 10–11:50am, West Hall 112
Studio Section 4: Thursday 12–1:50pm, West Hall 112

PROFESSOR:

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STUDIO SECTION LEADER:

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Office Hours: by appointment

• **COURSE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** This seven-week course is one half of the Media Studio A/V course, which is required of all EMAC and BS EArt majors. It will provide an introduction to computer music. Our primary focus will be hands-on creative work with sound. There will also be an introduction to some of the literature, history and theory of the field. Weekly assignments will include reading and listening assignments, as well as studio work.

The learning objectives for the course include gaining 1) a basic level of familiarity with the history of computer music, 2) a basic level of familiarity with current computer music tools, and 3) some experience creating music with these tools and thinking about creative and compositional problems in the context of historical practice.

The materials for the course, which you must purchase, include a textbook of source readings and a pair of good headphones. You will also need to purchase a ProTools LE system to use with your laptop, which will allow you to work with sound recording and editing, and with MIDI. Listening assignments are posted on a password protected area of the HASS server. Using your laptop, your ProTools software and iEAR's studio facilities you will make two computer music pieces in the seven weeks of the course. You will also write a brief paper relating to your reading assignments.

By the end of this segment of the course, you will be prepared to go on to the intermediate computer music course. However, even if you never take another computer music course, you will have the basic tools and experience which will allow you to work with sound and music in a more sophisticated and flexible manner in any future media projects, in school or on your own.

• **LECTURE:** The 2 hour weekly lectures will be divided between a) listening and discussion of musical examples and their historical and theoretical context, and b) specific technical and conceptual exercises related to your studio assignments. *Always bring your laptop to lectures*, in order to participate in in-class projects.

- **STUDIOS:** The studio is the place where you will receive specific technical instruction and constructive critique of your work in progress. Please arrive punctually to your studio sections. *Always bring your laptop* and any other materials you need to be able to work on, or receive critique on, your current project.

- **ASSIGNMENTS:** The only way to learn to work with sound and computers is to roll up your sleeves and start creating work. By focusing your work on your own laptop environment, using software which you can get to know, you should be able to take what you learn in this class with you, to enrich any future work you do with music or media, regardless of whether or not it has anything to do with “computer music.”

This is a MUSIC course, rather than a TECHNOLOGY course. To give you some context for your musical assignments, we will listen to a lot of music which has been created as the field of computer music has developed over the last half century. I expect that most, if not all of this music will be unfamiliar and strange to most of you. For the most part, this is music which is experimental in nature, which challenges the boundaries of music and noise, which pushes aesthetic and perceptual boundaries as it pushes technological limits. The readings will help you understand why and how the music has developed in the ways it has, and will give you some direction for how you can think about working with the materials you’ll use in your own pieces. There will be three assignments for this class, in addition to keeping up with regular reading and listening assignments:

- 1) a brief initial sonic portrait of some aspect of your aural environment, using sound materials which you have collected yourself; a 2 page written description of the sonic portrait
- 2) a piece which uses midi technology, with optional use of sampled sounds, and which incorporates one of a number of structural ideas about music which will be discussed in class; a 2 page written description of the piece
- 3) a 5–6 page paper which discusses in depth some of the music, musical ideas, or musical personalities you have been exposed to in the listening and reading assignments.

Using the class’ Rensselaer Learning Management System (RPILMS) site, you will be asked to respond to all reading and listening assignments. Topics for discussion will be posted each week, and you must make weekly entries. These entries will not be graded individually, but your participation in the on line discussions will constitute 10% of your final grade. The listening and reading will be discussed in studio sections as well. There will be no final exam for this class.

- **READING & LISTENING:** Most of the readings will come from *Audio Culture: readings in modern music*, edited by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, published by Continuum Books. This is a book of essays by composers, musicians and critics who discuss much of the music we’ll be studying. This book is in the RPI Union Bookstore, and you should plan to purchase it. There are also a few readings posted on the class website for you to download

All the required listening for the course is posted in a password protected area of the Arts server. Instructions for how to connect to the listening server are on the Listening Disk link on the class web page: <http://www.arts.rpi.edu/rolnick/classes/MSMusic> .

• **CONCERT REVIEWS:** You should attend at least 1 concert of music which is computer-related. This could include the events in the *iEAR Presents!* series, or some of the other computer music concerts presented in the area. A few local concerts scheduled for this semester are listed below.

iEAR Presents Events

10/21 Pamela Z, West Hall Auditorium, 7:30pm

EMPAC

Check <http://www.empac.rpi.edu/events/> for a full listing of events, but a few which will have particular relevance for this class are:

10/30 *New Nothing Series*, TBD + Zs, 8pm EMPAC Concert Hall

11/13 *New Nothing Series*, Skeleton\$ & Luciano Chessa, 8pm EMPAC Concert Hall

You should submit a 1–2 page review of the concert (MS Word or PDF formats, double spaced), describing who you saw, what they did or played, how it relates to computer music, and what you thought of the concert in terms of the music, the performance, the presentation, etc.

• **SOFTWARE & OTHER MATERIALS:** With a few exceptions, noted below, you are required to purchase a music hardware/software package for use in this class. The software is Digidesign *ProTools LE*. The Campus Computer Store is carrying a version of *ProTools LE* with an Mbox 2 Mini interface for \$166. This is a special price for RPI students: this system lists for \$329 from Digidesign. *ProTools* is the industry standard for sound and music editing, and is used as basic software in all intermediate and advanced computer music courses in the Arts Department. *ProTools* will also allow you to work with audio for video on a more professional level. Therefore, the investment you make in this hardware and software ought to be useful to you throughout your time at RPI, particularly if you intend to take any more studio courses in music or video.

You will also need a good pair of headphones for this course. I'd suggest something like the Sony MDR-XD200, the Sennheiser HD201 or the Audio-Technica ATH-M20 models. Each is about \$20–\$25, and they are widely available. However, any brand name closed-ear model headphone in this price range should work.

To collect audio samples, you will be able to check out a Flash Recorder with a microphone and cables from the Equipment Room (ER). The recorders contain flash media when you check them out, but you might also want to consider purchasing your own flash media. Later in the semester you'll be using MIDI controllers, which will be available for checkout from the ER or in the 110 Studio.

• **GRADING:** You will be graded as follows:

- 10% attendance and participation in lecture & studio
- 10% for contributions to on-line discussions
- 10% for concert report
- 20% for first project
- 25% for second project
- 25% for final paper

After you have handed in your first music project you will receive an interim evaluation of your progress in the class. To get an "A" you must do exceptional work. The "B" is

given for superior work -- more than simply fulfilling the obligations of the class. A "C" grade is considered average, and below that is below average or failing. And failing, my friends, is bad. Don't do it.

- **ATTENDANCE:** Attendance at all lectures and section meetings is required. Attendance will be taken. You are allowed one absence from the lecture, and one from your studio section. After that, each absence will diminish your final grade. If you miss a combined total of 5 lectures and studios, you will fail this portion of the course. The only exception is a written excuse from the Dean's office. We will be following an extremely rigorous schedule. If you miss any classes, you are expected to make up the missed work on your own – please befriend a kind colleague and work out some kind of deal.

- **LAPTOP USE:** Because there will be specific technical instructions in lecture, you should always bring your laptop to class. And, of course, the laptop will be a key component of your work in the studio. However, when I speak to the class, I try to give you my full attention, and I expect the same consideration in return. It's a waste of my time to lecture to students who are reading email or browsing the web. Therefore, except when working on a specific in-class assignment, *you may not use your laptop during lectures.*

- **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Student-teacher relationships are built on trust. Students must trust that teachers have made appropriate decisions about the structure and content of the courses they teach, and teachers must trust that the assignments students turn in are their own. Acts which violate this trust undermine the educational process. The Rensselaer Handbook defines various forms of academic dishonesty and procedures for responding to them. Students should familiarize themselves with this portion of the Handbook and should note that penalties for plagiarism and other forms of cheating can be quite severe. In this course, plagiarism will result in a grade of F for the assignment in question. In addition, the Dean of Students and the Dean of the student's school (Science, H&SS, etc.) will receive a letter that will note the grade, explain the reason for the grade, and request that the letter be made a part of the student's permanent record. A second offense will mean failure of the course.