**Music 170A:**

**Postwar American Experimentalism**

Mondays, 2:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.

Morrison Hall 250

Dr. David H. Miller

Office: Morrison Hall 226

Office hours (1/18–1/28): by appointment

Office hours (rest of semester): Mondays 12–1:30, Tuesdays 3:30–5, or by appointment

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**Course description:**

This course will define experimentalism broadly, including but not limited to electroacoustic music, indeterminism, improvisation, and minimalism, and will consider the work of John Cage, Julius Eastman, Charlotte Moorman, Pauline Oliveros, and Terry Riley, among many others. In addition to studying the historical context of this music within postwar American culture, we will take performing it as an opportunity to embody new and challenging modes of musical expression. The course materials are organized chronologically, but only very loosely, beginning around 1945 and ending around 1980.

Musicians of all backgrounds are welcome; students will be empowered to select and develop their own repertoire over the course of the semester. In lieu of a comprehensive survey of American experimentalism (which would, in any case, be impossible to complete in a single semester), our focus will be on works that are accessible to most performing musicians, without the need for much in the way of special equipment and/or specialized knowledge. Our work together will culminate in an end-of-semester concert.

**Texts:**

You are not required to purchase any texts for this course. All readings will be made available on the course website unless otherwise noted. Audio and video recordings can be found on the course YouTube playlist unless otherwise noted. See: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCjLxVmAF7Fa8ypujxyX1uJmRj7SQ9G3->.

**Course outline:**

* January 24: Introductions and preliminary exercises

*Part I: Pushing the boundary*

* January 31: John Cage
* February 7: La Monte Young and Christian Wolff

*Part II: Less is more*

* February 14: Terry Riley
* February 21: NO CLASS (Presidents’ Day)
* February 28: Steve Reich

*Part III: Pauline Oliveros*

* March 7: Introduction to Pauline Oliveros
* March 14: Pauline Oliveros (continued) with guest lecturer Dr. Kerry O’Brien
* March 21: NO CLASS (spring break)

*Part IV: Singular voices*

* March 28: Julius Eastman—*Class will meet remotely over Zoom today.*
* April 4: Meredith Monk
* April 11: Experimentalism into the 21st century: Charlotte Moorman, Seth Parker Woods, and guest composer Ellen Fullman

*Part V: Wrapping up*

* April 18: Presentations/rehearsal
* April 25: Presentations/rehearsal
* May 2 (during Reading/Review/Recitation Week) at 3:00 p.m.: Informal class performance (invite your friends!)

**Repertoire (tentative and subject to change):**

* Milton Babbitt—*Philomel* (1964)
* John Cage—*Sonatas and Interludes* (1948), *Music for Changes* (1951), *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), *4’33’’* (1952)
* Julius Eastman—*Stay on It* (1973), *Femenine* (1974), *The Holy Presence of Joan d’Arc* (1974), *Gay Guerrilla* (1979)
* Ellen Fullman—select works TBA
* Jim McWilliams/Charlotte Moorman—*Ice Music for London* (1972)
* Meredith Monk—Selections from *Key* (1971)
* Pauline Oliveros—*Bye Bye Butterfly* (1965), *Sonic Meditations* (1971)
* Steve Reich—*Come Out* (1966), *Piano Phase* (1967), *Clapping Music* (1972)
* Terry Riley—*In C* (1964)
* Christian Wolff—*Duo for Violins* (1950), *For 1, 2, or 3 People* (1964), *Prose Collection* (1969–71)
* Seth Parker Woods—*Iced Bodies* (2017)
* La Monte Young—*Compositions 1960* (1960), *Piano Pieces for David Tudor* (1960), *Drift Study* (1968)

**Course requirements and grading:**

1. Attendance: 20%
2. Participation and engagement: 20%
3. Homework assignments: 30%
4. Final performance and project: 30%

There are no exams or quizzes in this course.

**Attendance:**

Since we meet only once a week, and since a significant aspect of this course is making music together, attendance is especially important. Each student is permitted 1 unexcused absence over the course of the semester; additional absences will result in a deduction from your final grade.

That being said, I tend to be generous with excused absences, especially when given advance notice. *If there is a legitimate reason you cannot attend class (including but not limited to illness, mental health challenges, family commitments, job interviews, and travel for work or sports), please let me know at least a few days in advance. I will very likely grant you an excused absence, and your grade will not suffer as a result.*

**Participation and engagement:**

Given the nature of this course, it is crucial that all of us are fully present and engaged during our time together. As such, “participation and engagement” refers not only to participating in class discussions, but also to your general level of attention during class, your willingness to fully commit to the unfamiliar modes of performances we will be engaging in, and your communication with me outside of class (e.g. emails, office hours, etc.)

**Homework assignments:**

There will be homework assignments, including reading, listening, a performance exercise, and/or a short written reflection, during most weeks of this course (see the end of this syllabus for week-by-week details). Written work should be submitted to bCourses *by the beginning of class on the assigned day*. Each student’s lowest homework grade will be dropped.

**Final performance and project:**

The final project will involve researching a piece of your choosing, writing about it, discussing it during an in-class presentation, and preparing a performance of it. Further details will be announced towards the end of February.

**A note on writing, proofreading, and citations:**

Please make every effort to ensure that your writing is clearly organized and free of typos. Before handing in any piece of writing, take a few moments to proofread what you have written. In addition, note that we will be using the Chicago Manual of Style in this course to format citations and references to musical works. For further details on this, please take a few moments to read “Music Writing Style Guide” (posted in the “Files” section of the course website) prior to completing your first writing assignment.

**Technology policy:**

Laptops and tablets are permitted during the “classroom” portion of each class, which will usually be the first hour or so. Please do your best to use these devices only for referring to course readings and taking notes. During the second portion of each class, when we shift to performing music ourselves, I expect all electronic devices to be put away.

**Disability accommodations:**

Students with disabilities that affect their ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements are encouraged to notify me so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. Further information is available from the Disabled Students’ Program website at

<http://dsp.berkeley.edu>.

**Academic misconduct and plagiarism:**

Any instance of plagiarism or other academic dishonesty will result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct. According to the Berkeley Campus Code of Conduct, “Plagiarism includes use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source.” Furthermore, “All persons engaged in research at the University are responsible for adhering to the highest standards of intellectual honesty and integrity in research.” This statement is available at the website on official campus policies and procedures at <http://campuspol.chance.berkeley.edu/index.cfm>, under the keyword “plagiarism.”

**Homework assignments:**

*A few things to note:*

* Assignments are subject to change and probably *will* change during some weeks; I will notify you if that is the case, but otherwise you can assume that the assignments will follow what is listed here.
* Readings are listed in the order in which I recommend reading them. Listening assignments are listed in chronological order.
* Please note that readings marked as optional truly are optional! They are what I will be reading in preparation for class, but you should only read them if you find yourself particularly interested in that week’s topic. These readings are also a great place to start if you want to learn more about a topic in preparation for working on your final project.
* Written work should be 2–4 paragraphs in length unless otherwise noted and should be submitted to bCourses *by the beginning of class on the assigned day*.

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January 31:

*Read:*

* Alex Ross—*The Rest is Noise*, pp. 396–404
* Lydia Goehr—*The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works,* Chapter 9, section V
  + Note that the entire chapter is posted on bCourses, but only section V (pp. 260–65) is required.
* John Cage—*Lecture on Nothing*
* OPTIONAL: Richard Taruskin—“No Ear for Music: The Scary Purity of John Cage”

*Listen:*

* John Cage—Sonata No. 1 from *Sonatas and Interludes* (1948)
* Cage—*Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951)
* Cage—*Music of Changes* I (1951)

*Do:*

* In the spirit of Cage’s works for prepared piano, “prepare” your instrument (whatever it may be, even if it is just your voice) in a way that you think makes some kind of new and/or interesting sound. Come to class ready to demonstrate your prepared instrument
  + If you are preparing a piano or another large instrument that is impossible to bring to class, please let me know ahead of time.

*Write:*

* Assemble an audience, large or small, consisting of friends, family, roommates, significant others, classmates, and/or strangers. Perform Cage’s *4’33’’* for them (score posted on bCourses). Describe what it felt like to perform the work, and what your audience’s reaction was like.

February 7:

*Read:*

* Program note for Young’s *Drift Study*.
* Skim through the performance instructions for La Monte Young’s *Compositions 1960* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compositions_1960>) and Christian Wolff’s *Prose Collection* (posted on bCourses).

*Listen:*

* Christian Wolff—*Duo for Violins* (1950)
* La Monte Young—*Drift Study* (1968)

*Do:*

* Practice both lines of Wolff’s *Duo for Violins* (score posted on bCourses) in whatever octave is appropriate for your instrument/voice; if you are singing, use a syllable like “la” or “lu.” Try to meet up with another student in the class to play the piece together.

*Write:*

* In today’s class we consider the million-dollar question of this era of music history (a question we broached already last week): to what extent are text-based conceptual pieces like Young’s *Compositions 1960* or Wolff’s *Prose Collection* even music at all? Make an argument for these works to be considered music or to be considered *not* music. You may wish to consider what these works have in common (if anything) with a more traditionally notated work from the period, such as Wolff’s *Duo for Violins*, and/or a less traditionally executed work that nonetheless functions in performance in a manner similar to more familiar works, like Young’s *Drift Study*.

February 14:

*Read:*

* Alex Ross—*The Rest is Noise*, pp. 536–541
* Kyle Gann—“Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism,” from *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*
* Susan McClary—“Rap, Minimalism, and Structures of Time in Late Twentieth-Century Culture,” from *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*

*Listen:*

* Terry Riley—*In C* (1964)

*Do:*

* Practice *In C* (score posted on bCourses) and come to class ready to play it.

*Write:*

* The recording of *In C* posted on the course YouTube playlist is about an hour long. Try to listen to the whole thing in one sitting, and keep a running journal of your thoughts, reactions, and moods as you listen. Edit the journal as needed once you are done, then submit it to bCourses.

February 21*—NO CLASS (Presidents’ Day)*

February 28:

*Read:*

* Steve Reich—“Music as a Gradual Process”
* Sumanth Gopinath—"The Problem of the Political in Steve Reich’s *Come Out*,” from *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*

*Listen:*

* Steve Reich—*Come Out* (1966)
* Reich—*Piano Phase* (1967)
* Reich—*Clapping Music* (1972)

*Do:*

* Prepare to perform *Clapping Music* in class (score posted on bCourses). Ideally, find a partner to practice it with!

*Write:*

* Reich’s *Come Out* is the most overtly political work we have studied so far this semester. Based on your reading of the article by Sumanth Gopinath, what are the ostensible political goals of *Come Out*? Is it an effective piece of activist art? Why or why not? Refer to the Gopinath article as you see fit, including use of direct quotations if and when called for.

March 7:

*Read:*

* Norton Anthology of Western Music—Listening guide to section 1 of *Philomel*
* Sarah Weaver—“Roots for Deep Listening in Oliveros’s *Bye Bye Butterfly*”
* Pauline Oliveros—“And Don’t Call Them ‘Lady’ Composers”
* Kerry O’Brien—“Listening as Activism: The “Sonic Meditations” of Pauline Oliveros” (<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/listening-as-activism-the-sonic-meditations-of-pauline-oliveros>)
* OPTIONAL: Martha Mockus—pp. 22–33 (on *Bye Bye Butterfly*) and pp. 37–80 (on *Sonic Meditations*) from *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality*

*Listen:*

* Milton Babbitt—Section 1 of *Philomel* (1964)
* Pauline Oliveros—*Bye Bye Butterfly* (1965)

*Do:*

* Read the introductions on the first two pages of Oliveros’ *Sonic Meditations* (posted on bCourses). Then, perform one of the following meditations: “Native” (p. 9), “Sonic Rorschach” (p. 10), “Environmental Dialogue” (p. 13), “One Word” (p. 19), “Tumbling Song” (p. 23), or “Your Voice” (p. 29). Be sure to attempt a performance of your chosen meditation at least 2–3 times, and come to class ready to discuss your experience.

*Write:*

* Summarize the main arguments of the assigned article by Sarah Weaver. Use direct quotations as necessary, but try to use your own words to paraphrase Weaver’s points whenever possible.

March 14:

*Dr. Kerry O’Brien guest lecture—assignments TBA*

March 21*—NO CLASS (spring break)*

March 28: *(Class will meet remotely over Zoom today.)*

*Read:*

* Alex Ross—“Julius Eastman’s Guerrilla Minimalism” (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/23/julius-eastmans-guerrilla-minimalism>)
* Kerry O’Brien—“The world catches up to iconoclastic composer Julius Eastman” (<https://chicagoreader.com/music/the-world-catches-up-to-iconoclastic-composer-julius-eastman/>)
* Matthew Mendez—““That piece does not exist without Julius”: Still Staying on *Stay on It*,” from *Gay Guerrilla: Julius Eastman and His Music*
* OPTIONAL: Luciano Chessa—“*Gay Guerrilla*: A Minimalist Choralphantasie,” from *Gay Guerrilla: Julius Eastman and His Music*

*Listen:*

* Julius Eastman—*Stay on It* (1973)
* Eastman—*Femenine* (1974)
* Eastman—*The Holy Presence of Joan d’Arc* (1974)
* Eastman—*Gay Guerrilla* (1979)

*Write:*

* Out of the four Eastman pieces we are listening to this week, which one did you find most affecting and/or effective? Which one spoke to you the most? Why? Be sure to discuss musical details of whatever piece you select. You may also refer to the assigned readings in your response, though this is not required.

April 4:

*Read:*

* Angela Westwater—“Meredith Monk: An Introduction” (<https://www.artforum.com/print/197305/meredith-monk-an-introduction-38603>)

*Listen:*

* Meredith Monk—*Key* (1971)
  + Be sure to listen to the whole album (10 tracks); note that there are multiple tracks titled “Vision.”

*Do:*

* Prepare to perform Monk’s “Change,” from *Key*, in class (score posted on bCourseS). Try singing it if you can, but if you don’t feel comfortable singing then you are also welcome to bring an instrument to play.

*Write:*

* Identify the most unusual or unexpected vocal sound you heard on Monk’s *Key* (be sure to note the track and timestamp). Why does this particular sound jump out to you? Then, try reproducing the sound with your own voice. Is it difficult? Why or why not?

April 11:

*Read:*

* Caitlin Schmid—“ Ice(d) Music/Cello/Bodies: Re-staging Charlotte Moorman’s Ice Music (1972–2018)”

*Watch:*

* Documentary on Seth Parker Woods’ *Iced Bodies* (<https://vimeo.com/251219756>)

April 18 and 25:

* No homework for these two weeks! We will use our time to listen to everyone’s final project presentations and prepare for our class performance.