Expressive Culture: Music [“*Deliberately Weird Musics*“] Spring 2024 CORE UA-730. 4 points. Professor Elizabeth Hoffman [elizabeth.hoffman@nyu.edu](mailto:elizabeth.hoffman@nyu.edu); available daily by appt. #268, 24 Waverly Place)

**Mondays & Wednesdays  3:30PM - 4:45PM (LEC)**;

Recitation instructors: Elizabeth Frickey and Trevor Van de Velde.

CORE-UA 730 001 Expressive Culture: Sounds     LEC       MW 3:30pm - 4:45pm       Silver, Rm 320  
CORE-UA 730 002 Expressive Culture: Sounds    RCT 1     F 9:30am - 10:45am         Silver, Rm 218.   
CORE-UA 730 003 Expressive Culture: Sounds    RCT 2     F 11:00am - 12:15pm       Silver, Rm 218  
CORE-UA 730 004 Expressive Culture: Sounds    RCT 3     F 12:30pm - 1:45pm         Silver, Rm 218  
CORE-UA 730 005 Expressive Culture: Sounds    RCT 4     F 2:00pm - 3:15pm           Silver, Rm 218

CORE Program Office:  726 Broadway, room 714; and website:  <http://cas.nyu.edu/core> and email: [core.cas@nyu.edu](mailto:core.cas@nyu.edu).

**Syllabus**

*Deliberately Weird Musics*

The character of “weird Barbie,” highlighted recently in Greta Gerwig’s film, is a provocative analogy for certain tangents in Western musical culture. Imagine, in place of a child gleefully deforming a stereotypical doll, a composer intentionally mangling musical norms. ‘Experimental’ composers likewise may obtain unusual results. But, composers seeking to make a cultural icon deliberately strange produce an affect all its own; the new art engages reactively with and in negation to traditional tropes of beauty and other prescribed societal values. In this course we’ll consider, in this spirit, a range of strangenesses dependent on what they reject. As we consider musics with weird tunings, weird rhythms, weird instruments, weird forms, weird styles, weird lyrics, and weird performances, we’ll simultaneously consider the driving forces behind some of the normative directives that have shaped so much of Western musical culture over the past several hundred years.

This class thus explores the circumstances and values that have led certain creators to pursue eccentricity—whether in a given piece or in general. By asking this question through applications of critical reasoning, and by cultivating critical listening, we will explore how culture is intertwined with political, economic, and social phenomena. Musical culture is the result of individual contributions, but, those individual artists exist in a social network laden with diverse pressures. Arguably more so than the other arts, music is omnipresent in our lives; this is largely through technological advances that have made it so portable.

This class will approach its topic from hands-on study of music, through recordings and notation about which we’ll learn a bit, and live performances; and through primary and secondary source readings in music theory, acoustics, history, critical theory, and cultural studies.

**Diversity:** This course topic addresses directly questions of “diversity” of musical objects and musical rules, acknowledging through exploration of particular case studies, the profoundly inequitable effects on the production of knowledge due to race, class, sexuality, and gender. For example, composers who are awarded large monetary grants and recognition are typically (though not always) pushed to conform to normative aesthetic stipulations. Is the notion of ‘great’ art entirely historically and culturally determined? How has social media and the internet complicated analysis of this question? This class willexplore historical, formal, and critical vocabularies of ***sonic*** media; and the relations between artistic activity and social organizations. The course will draw heavily upon New York City resources, and will reinforce your confidence in exploring NYC cultural outlets independently.

The themes of Expressive Culture, more generally, intersect with many questions raised in *Cultures and Contexts* about how we function as members of groups; so, at times we will work through assignments that embrace this interconnection. But, our engagement with music (and, tangentially, all of the arts) will be key. The role that music already plays in many of your own lives hopefully will be deepened.

**Pre-requisites:** [none]

The College Core Curriculum *represents the considered judgment of the faculty about what every College graduate should know as a part of his or her liberal arts education—those areas of inquiry that are pursued for the sake of expanding human knowledge, rather than as training for a particular profession.* And, so, especially for this reason, this CORE course does not require that you know anything about music as a discipline.

*Education in the liberal arts builds your critical, analytic, and communications skills,* and also gives you the skills and confidence to be engaged with the society around you, actively shaping it, perceptibly through specific actions (like concert attendance, or voting), or imperceptibly through more nuanced actions (like taking music lessons or using music therapy to promote personal wellness or mental health). Though this course will focus mostly on Western musics, *students should come to think of themselves as citizens of a larger world by gaining the ability to comprehend how people remote from themselves understand, experience, and imagine their lives.* We will therefore consider whether ideas like ‘normativity’ and ‘the canon’ and ‘originality’ exist or not in traditional Asian and African musical cultures.

**Grading Schema:**

20% recitation participation

50% written and creative assignments (all assignment grades will be averaged)

15% mid-term recitation group presentations [April 1]

15% final [May 13]

***Course Pragmatics:***

**Late work**: Assignments will be accepted for full credit within an approximately two-week range of any due date. Despite this flexibility it is much better for *you* to submit the assignments on time since we can then return them on time. You will in this way be much better able to follow the lecture discussions. Please retain copies of all your work until a final grade has been received for the course.

**Participation:** One fifth of your overall course grade will be awarded an ‘A’ through ‘F’ based on your recitation instructor’s assessment of your participation (including being on time to class). No extra credit assignments are allowed in any Core courses.

**Attendance:** Youare expected to attend all lectures, recitations, and any field trips that occur during class time. You will of course be excused for documented medical or personal emergency, and will receive accommodation for religious holiday observance. In these cases, please contact the Instructor or Recitation TA in advance or, in cases of emergency, as soon as is practical. You are responsible for making up any material or assignments you miss. Finding a study partner who will help fill you in on any class conversations missed is a strategy that will be helpful for everyone. If you would like assistance in forming a study group like cohort from within the class, *please do not hesitate to ask me* (Prof. Hoffman) or your Recitation Instructor.

**Final Exam:** The final exam date and time will be Monday, May 13, 2pm – 3:30pm. Please plan your end-of-semester travel with this date in mind.

To receive an Incomplete for this course, you must have completed all other requirements save for the Final Exam, including satisfactory attendance, and there must be a strong likelihood that you will pass the course when all work is completed.

**Classroom Decorum**

Students and instructors alike have an obligation to create an educational atmosphere of mutual trust and respect in which differences of opinion can be aired without animus.

As a matter of courtesy to your fellow students and to your instructors, please arrive at class promptly, prepared and ready to participate. Please shut off cell phones, and—except in cases of emergency—remain in the classroom for the duration of the lecture or section meeting. If it is necessary to leave or enter a room with class in session please do so quietly. Under University policy, disruptive classroom behavior may be subject to disciplinary sanction. Devices are permitted in this class, but they might at some point be disallowed if the collective attention is attenuated due to their use.

**Questions and Concerns**

Up-to-date course information is available on the Core Curriculum website: http://core.cas.nyu.edu. Questions, concerns, comments, and feedback may be directed to the following members of the Core Curriculum staff, located in 903 Silver Center, 212-998-8119. Complaints will remain confidential.

**Academic Integrity:**

As a student at New York University, you have been admitted to a community of scholars who value free and open inquiry. Our work depends on honest assessment of ideas and their sources; and we expect you, as a member of our community, likewise to maintain integrity in your academic work. Because of the importance of these values to the intellectual community, those who fail to maintain them will be subject to sanctions including failing the course or dismissal from the University.

Plagiarism consists in presenting ideas and words *without acknowledging their source* and is an offense against academic integrity. Any of the following constitutes a crime of plagiarism.

* Using a phrase, sentence, or passage from another person’s work without quotation marks and attribution of the source.
* Paraphrasing words or ideas from another’s work without attribution.
* Reporting as your own research any data or facts gathered or reported by another person.
* Submitting in your own name papers or reports completed by another.
* Submitting your own original work toward requirements in more than one class without the permission of the instructors.

Other offenses against academic integrity include the following:

* Giving your work to another student to submit as his or her own.
* Copying answers from other students during examinations.
* Using notes or other sources to answer exam questions without the instructor’s permission.
* Secreting or destroying library or reference materials.
* Submitting as your own work a paper or results of research that you have purchased from a commercial firm.

Plagiarism and other cases of academic fraud are matters of fact, not intention. It is therefore crucial that you be diligent in assuring the integrity of your work.

* Use quotation marks to set off words that are not your own.
* Learn to use proper forms of attribution for source materials.
* Do your own work in each class, without collaboration, unless otherwise instructed.
* Don’t use published sources, the work of others, or material from the web without attribution.

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**ASSIGNMENTS//DUE DATES** [*All assignments and course readings and listenings will be posted on Brightspace*. Each topic will be presented on the given syllabus date; your readings and listenings should be done between that date and the next class meeting.]

**January 22**, 2024 – start of class. Introduction of essential concepts and questions. Instrumental and ensemble standardization, 1600 – present. Non-standard instruments: construction, sound qualities, playing techniques, and histories.

Reading Week 1: “The 15 weirdest and strangest works of classical music” <https://www.classical-music.com/features/articles/15-weirdest-works-classical-music/> in “Classical Music,” published by [BBC Music Magazine](https://www.classical-music.com/author/bbc-music-magazine/) (August 8, 2014).

Biber (1678)[!] *Mystery Sonatas* (use of “scordatura”)

<https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.4/mto.20.26.4.desouza.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w90ZZEwXJi4&t=4900s>

*Poor Things* (2023)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxZ24jVxpJM> “Bella”

https://onthescore.com/jerskin-fendrix-is-the-mad-musical-scientist-of-poor-things/

**January 24**

**Instruments that are outside the canon in terms of how they are played, how they are constructed, how they are tuned, how they sound, what kind of music they are designed to play.**

*Concerto for Jaw Harp in E major*, Albrechtsberger (1771)

(Writing assignment1, due January 29)

**January 29**

Listen to:

David Bedford’s *With 100 Kazoos* (1971) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/With_100_Kazoos#:~:text=According%20to%20Bedford%2C%20his%20composition,between%20himself%20and%20the%20audience>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uaHCUENU_k&t=1060s> [performance]

“Lovely Rita,” Beatles (1967) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqe_yLT8wd4&t=96s> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWIgt4ONPkU&t=10s> [isolated piano, guitars, and kazoo]

“Crosstown Traffic,” Jimi Hendrix (1968)

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/29859/great-moments-kazoo-history>

Hendrix doubled the guitar line by blowing through a kazoo constructed from a comb and cellophane.  
November 18, 1968 (US); April 4, 1969 (UK): Electric Ladyland album

Jug Band performance [Juggernaut Jug Band, Louisville, KY]

https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ket-music-performance-110/jug-band-music-music-arts-toolkit/

**January 31**

*Toy Symphony*, Leopold Mozart (c. 1760) Toy piano, Margaret Leng Tan. Toys as instruments, Stuart Dempster

Bijsterveld, Karin and Marten Schulp. 2004. “Breaking into a World of Perfection: Innovation in Today's Classical Musical Instruments,” in *Social Studies of Science*, 34/5 Special Issue on Sound Studies: New Technologies and Music (Oct., 2004), pp. 649-674.

(Creative assignment2, due February 5)

**February 5** Assigned Reading and Listening Week 3:

György Ligeti:

Piano Etude #1: Désordre *Poeme symphonique*  for 100 metronomes Violin Concerto, scordatura based on DB natural harmonics

<https://www.thestranger.com/music/2018/01/03/25648756/come-for-the-long-lost-stravinsky-stay-for-the-weird-ass-ligeti>

**Feb 7 – readings for Feb 12**

(Writing assignment3, due February 12)

**February 12** GUEST: Kat Mustatea: Body Mouth Instrument: rationales, goals, and implications of instrument design.

**February 14** GUEST: Tom Chiu, NYC avant-garde violinist and composer and improviser: discussion and demonstration of strange music he has played and created across his career; and why he would categorize it as such.

(Writing assignment4, due February 19)

**February 19 (no classes)**

**February 21 and 26** Assigned Reading and Listening Week 5: Humor in Weirdness or, Weirdness through Humor

Cat Duet**,** after **Gioachino Rossini (1825).**

**A mashup of C.E.F.Weyse, Katte-Kavatina (c. 1800) [score study]; “No, non temer serena,” Rodrigo/Iago duet, Rossini *Otello* opera; and Rodrigo aria** "Ah, come mai non senti" [additional listening].

https://ndamstamericana.com/2021/03/08/miss-americana-vs-the-patriarchy-feminist-humor-in-taylor-swifts-satirical-music-videos/ [first half of this essay]

“Blank Space” (2014), Taylor Swift

[https://ndamstamericana.com/]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWNaR-rxAic> [“Call Me Maybe,” Carly Rae Jeppeson]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxpDa-c-4Mc> [“Hotline Bling,” Drake]

(Writing assignment5, due February 26)

Required Readings:

Randall Moore and David Johnson: “Effects of Musical Experience on Perception of and Preference for Humor in Western Art Music” in Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education , Spring, 2001, No. 149, Pioneering Inquiry in the New Century: Exemplars of Music Research, Part II (Spring, 2001), pp. 31-37.

Mordechai Gordon: “Exploring the Relationship between Humor and Aesthetic Experience” in The Journal of Aesthetic Education , Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 110-121.

L. W. Kline: “The Psychology of Humor” in The American Journal of Psychology , Oct., 1907, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Oct., 1907), pp. 421-441.

END of FIRST PART OF COURSE

**February 28** Listening and Reading Week 6: The avant-garde: is all avant-garde music weird? Is all weird music avant-garde?

Doorman, Maarten. 2021. “From Romanticism to the Avant-Garde,” chapter from *Art in Progress:* 45 – 59.

**La Monte Young:**Piano Piece for Terry Riley #1(1960) <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127639> [score] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59qHcvM5lrI> [performance]

**March 4**

Judy Dunaway – balloon musics <http://www.judydunaway.com/balloon-music-manifesto.html> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUoLIQR4Rg4&t=3s> [performance]

Erik Satie – *Vexations* (1893) [To contemporaries, this music was an example of ‘strange.’] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKKxt4KacRo&t=107s> [score and performance] Chennevière, Rudyar. 1919. “Erik Satie and the Music of Irony,” in *The Musical Quarterly* 5/4: 469-78l.

(Writing assignment6, due March 4)

**March 4 and 6:** Listening and score study, and performance study, Week 7:

**March 4**

**Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Helicopter Quartet* (1993)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13D1YY_BvWU>

**John Cage: 4’33” [performances, and score study (two versions)]Also: Various covers of this piece!**   
 Cage, John, and Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner. 1965. “An Interview with John Cage,” in *The Tulane Drama Review*, Winter, 1965, 10/2 (Winter, 1965): 50-72.

Iddon, Martin. 2004. “The Haus That Karlheinz Built: Composition, Authority, and Control at the 1968 Darmstadt Ferienkurse,” in *The Musical Quarterly* , Spring, 2004, 87/1: 87-118.

(Writing assignment7, due March 11)

**March 11, 13**: Listening and Reading Week 8: Classical era: Beethoven as a case study

The inexplicable nature of Beethoven’s late period formal designs. (What is musical ‘form’?) What do these ‘late period’ pieces suggest about Beethoven’s intentions? What do they mean for listener reception? And, most fundamentally, why exactly are they recognized as ‘strange,’ by any metrics applied?

<https://smartandsoulfulmusic.wordpress.com/2016/05/06/triple-compound-toe-tappers-day-5-piano-sonata-no-32-in-c-minor-opus-111-movement-ii-arietta-by-ludwig-van-beethoven/>

Ross, Alex. 2021. “Keep Beethoven Weird,” in *The New Yorker*. January 19, 2021.

(Writing assignment8, due March 25)

**March 16 - 24 (Saturday – Sunday) no classes, Spring break**

**March 25:** Strangeness in performance directives: two players on one lute!

**John Dowland:**My Lord Chamberlain, His Galliard (1597) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wEUxBD7g7Y> Why did the composer do this? What is gained and what is lost, and why is this such a strange and uncommon performance practice?

END of SECOND PART of COURSE

Contemporary songs and popular musics.

**March 27**

Visit from NYC Rap artist RTSNeutral: conventional Rap and breaking the genre boundaries: meanings, motivations, and techniques; words and music

**April 1** Mid-Term Group [Recitation Groups] Presentations; assignment TBA

**April 3**

Reading:

Razin, Alexander. 2022. “Ten Insanely Weird Songs Making You Say, ‘What the Hell?’: Composing Your Idiosyncracies,” in *The Medium,* May 21, 2022. [Class discussion.]

**April 8** Mid-Term Group [Recitation Groups] Presentations

**April 10** *King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizzard*

GUEST: Cayla DeLardi: KGLW afficionado and fanbase expert

Analytic Themes:

Use of strange rhythmic conventions: 7/4 [analysis of selected number of nearly 20 songs of theirs in this meter]

Overall intentional defiance or deflection of genre or sound alignment; what is the intention behind their flippant album titles? What is their relation to their fanbase?

Treatment of the feminine voice, and gender attitudes manifest in the band, and its performance practices – analysis of Seductress Sadie, and its genesis and creation

Use of microtones [*Flying Microtonal Banana*]

**April 15**

**Frank Zappa:**

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXpcg5KeTH0**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVn0CZS18zI**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVn0CZS18zI)

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QF0PYQ8IOL4**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QF0PYQ8IOL4)

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPjKacvp6iU**

* Lumpy Gravy – 1968. Concept album.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8uU6MwKVKQ>
* Frank Zappa Meets The Mothers Of Prevention (1985)
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsvS29pDuME> “We’re Turning Again”
* Shut Up'n Play Yer Guitar – 1981.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-8upWvxHzQ> “Beat it with your Fist”
* “Billy the Mountain” (1972) [30 minutes] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QcdcOu0MTM https://www.songlyrics.com/frank-zappa/billy-the-mountain-lyrics/

**Grimes:** Boucher, Claire. “In my Life I’m a Lot More Weird than This,” in The Guardian, October 31, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/oct/31/claire-boucher-grimes-art-angels>

“Genesis” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FH-q0I1fJY&t=167s>

“Eight” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTvanzhR6ok&t=49s

(Writing assignment9, due April 15)

**April 17**

GUEST: Composer, instrument designer Miguel Frasconi (NYC), glass instruments; influences of Indian musics on his composition design concepts.

‘Normativity’ and ‘the Canon’ and ‘originality’ outside of the Western framework. Are these strange concepts in certain non-Western frameworks?

Frasconi, Miguel. 2023 rev [2008]. “Why Glass?”

**April 22 –** follow up discussion

**April 24 and 29 –** student interest areas, TBD

**May 1**

**May 6** – Last day of classes – final collaborative performance; assignment TBA.

May 13 – final exam: 2 – 3:30pm.

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