The Psychology of Music
Haverford College
Psychology 303

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Office Hours: before class and by appointment

Course Description
Music is a human universal that has been found throughout history and across different cultures of the world. Why, then, is music so ubiquitous and what functions does it serve? The intent of this course is to examine this question from multiple psychological perspectives. Within a biological framework, it is useful to consider the evolutionary origins of music, its neural substrates, and the development of music processing. The field of cognitive psychology raises questions concerning the relationship between music and language, and music’s ability to communicate emotive meaning that may influence visual processing and body movement. From the perspectives of social and personality psychology, music can be argued to serve a number of social functions that, on a more individual level, contribute to a sense of self and identity. Lastly, musical behavior will be considered in a number of applied contexts that include consumer behavior, music therapy, and the medical environment. Prerequisites: Psychology 100, 200, and at least one advanced 200-level course.

Biological Perspectives

A. Evolutionary Origins of Music
When did music evolve in the overall evolutionary scheme of events and why? Does music serve any adaptive purposes or is it, as some have argued, merely “auditory cheesecake”? What types of evidence allows us to make inferences about the origins of music?

Reading:


B. Insights from Developmental Psychology & Music Acquisition
One means in which to examine the evolutionary and biological bases of music is to consider whether newborn infants display any innate processing capabilities for musical events.

Reading:


**Two student paper presentations on musical predispositions (synthesized from two above papers) - one on pitch/melodic and temporal processing – another on maternal music**

- **Topic Presentation: Music in the Womb**

**Suggested Reading:**


**C. Neural Substrates of Music Processing**
What are the neural substrates of musical behavior and how is musical listening and performance mediated by the brain? How might this research be informed by individuals displaying different types of disorders in musical processing?

**Reading:**


- **Topic Presentation: Musical Disorders Beyond Amusia & Synesthesia**

**Suggested Reading:**


D. Relationship Between Music and Language?
As we will discover, several theorists have argued that music and language evolved in parallel to one another. Indeed, music and language display a remarkable number of similarities in their structure and syntax and, at a neural level, appear to be mediated by similar structures within the brain. Given this, how can we conceptualize the relationship between music and language?

Reading:


Cognitive Perspectives

A. Music and Emotion
Does music have meaning? One way in which this question has been addressed is to consider music’s ability to communicate and instill emotional experiences within listeners.

Readings:


B. Music and Motion
People move as music moves. But are the gestures and body movements of a listener in any way lawfully related to musical structure and meaning? What about the movements of musical performers? What functions might these serve, not only to a listening audience but to other members of a performing ensemble?

Reading:


- **Topic Presentation: Music and Synesthesia**

  **Suggested Reading:**


- **C. Music and Dance**

  Dance is medium that reflects both the emotive power of music as well as the relationship between music and motion.

  **Reading:**


- **D. Music/Film Interactions**

  One way in which both the motive and emotive influence of music has been used for artistic purposes is as an accompanying soundtrack to a visual story (i.e., film). Certainly, music can be used as a means in which to enhance the emotional impact of a scene but what are some other effects that music may exert upon story comprehension, interpretation, and appreciation?

  **Reading:**


E. Cognitive Benefits from Music Training?
Does learning to play a musical instrument, and musical training more generally, serve to enhance certain cognitive skills that are used in different domains of life?

**Reading:**


Social and Personality Perspectives

A. Social Functions of Music
Some theorists have argued that music emerged as a means in which to bring people together and promote social cooperation. In this section, we'll consider some different ways in which this occurs and some ways this may exert an influence at the individual level.

**Reading:**

Gregory, A. (1997). The roles of music in society: The ethnomusicological perspective. In A. North & D. Hargreaves (Eds.), *The social psychology of music*. Oxford University Press. *(Student presentation)*

➢ **Topic Presentation: Cross-Cultural Differences in Music**

**Suggested Reading:**

B. Musical Tastes and Preferences
What set of factors determine the types of music we most prefer? Do people who share musical preferences also share certain attributes and, if so, then on what dimensions? Lastly, are some musical tastes and preferences influenced by the culture in which we live?

**Reading:**


- **Topic Presentation: Music and Political Thought**

C. Music in Adolescents and the Developing Sense of Self and Identity

As noted by Erickson and other theorists, adolescence is a key period in which our sense of self and identity emerges and takes shape. How might music influence this process?

**Reading:**


- **Topic Presentation: Music and Autobiographical Memory**

**Suggested Reading:**


**Music in Applied Contexts**

A. Some General Uses of Music

As the poet William Congreve noted, “Music hath charms to soothe a savage beast”. Indeed, music is used in a number of applied settings for a variety of purposes. This final section of the course considers a selected sample of these applications in the contexts of marketing and consumer behavior, psychotherapy, and the medical environment.

**Reading:**


**B. Consumer and Environmental Atmospherics**

**Reading:**


**C. Music in the Clinical and Medical Environments**

**Reading:**


**Student presentation on music therapy synthesized from two above papers.**


➢ **Topic Presentation: Music in Sports and Exercise**

**Suggested Reading:**

**Grading Scheme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Synthesis Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
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**I. Discussion and Participation**

This is a seminar course and so you are expected to contribute to classroom discussions on a regular basis. To do so effectively, you need to read the assigned papers for each class meeting.

**II. Paper Presentation**

During the semester, each student will be responsible for presenting a 20-30 minute review of a paper that has been assigned for a given topic, and then leading a subsequent discussion session. Your presentation should consist of a set of Powerpoint slides that outline the main ideas within the paper, as well as any key research that is discussed.
Before your presentation, you should develop a set of 5-6 discussion questions (from which we’ll select 3-4) which represent thoughts, clarifications, or related questions that come to mind and which help to promote dialogue during the class (i.e., it gives us stuff to talk about). Please submit your questions to me via e-mail (mboltz@haverford.edu) at least 3 days prior to your presentation, and I will then post them on the Moodle course page. All students should bring the discussion questions for that week to class.

III. Topic Presentation
Working in groups of two, each of you will be required to give an in-class presentation on a topic designed to provide greater breadth to an area discussed in class. You should plan on speaking for 30 min. and rely on a Powerpoint presentation (which I will then post on Moodle so that it is available to everyone). I’ve provided a set of presentation topics on the syllabus and will try to ensure that everyone receives a topic that is acceptable to them. Each presentation will be followed by a discussion session led by both students and focused upon a set of readings that have been assigned in advance. On the syllabus, you will notice that I’ve provided some suggested readings for several of the topics but these are only suggestions which may or may not be useful. You should certainly search for and rely on other papers/book chapters, and it is possible you’ll want to assign some of these instead of the ones I’ve suggested.

VI. Synthesis Paper
In addition to the presentation, you will also be required to write a paper for the course. You are free to choose any topic that interests you as long as it involves some aspect of psychomusicology. It could be a topic that was never discussed (e.g., music performance; composition and improvisation; learning musical skills; music creativity) or a topic that was addressed in class but explored from a different perspective. In either case, the paper should be around 15-20 pages and rely on the APA style of referencing. Most of the paper should serve as a review of the relevant literature but the last 2-3 pages should provide your own thoughts and evaluation (e.g. critiques of the literature; ideas for future research). Your paper will be due on November 3.

VII. Research Proposal
The final requirement of the course is to develop an original research project that addresses some aspect of music cognition and satisfies the following criteria: a) represents a novel study that, to the best of your knowledge, has not previously been done; b) relies on the experimental method (vs. correlation, multiple regression, or other nonexperimental techniques); and c) could feasibly be done at Haverford. This final paper should contain the following sections: an Introduction that reviews the relevant literature and the particular question(s) you are posing; a Methods section (along with its appropriate sub-sections) that describes how you would do the study; a section relating the predicted pattern of results; and, of course, a Reference section. Your proposal is due on December 3.

Some General Resources in Psychomusicology


Levitan, D.J. (2006). *This is your brain on music: The science of a human obsession.* Dutton Publishing.


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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Overview and Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon - Sept. 8</td>
<td>Origins of Music</td>
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<td>Wed - Sept. 10</td>
<td>Origins of Music</td>
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<td>Mon - Sept. 15</td>
<td>Music Acquisition</td>
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<td>Wed – Sept. 17</td>
<td>Music Acquisition</td>
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<td>Mon - Sept. 22</td>
<td>Music Acquisition; Presentation on Music in the Womb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed - Sept. 24</td>
<td>Neural Substrates</td>
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<td>Mon - Sept. 29</td>
<td>Neural Substrates; Presentation on Music Disorders</td>
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<td>Wed – Oct. 1</td>
<td>Neural Substrates</td>
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<td>Mon – Oct. 6</td>
<td>Music and Language</td>
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<td>Wed – Oct. 8</td>
<td>Music and Language</td>
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<td>Mon - Oct. 13</td>
<td>Fall Break</td>
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<td>Wed – Oct. 15</td>
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<td>Mon – Oct. 20</td>
<td>Music and Emotion</td>
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<td>Wed – Oct. 22</td>
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<td>Mon - Oct. 27</td>
<td>Music and Emotion; Music and Motion</td>
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<td>Wed – Oct. 29</td>
<td>Music and Motion – Presentation on Synesthesia</td>
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<td>Mon - Nov. 3</td>
<td>Synthesis Paper Due; Music and Motion – Presentation on Music Performance</td>
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<td>Wed - Nov. 5</td>
<td>Music and Film</td>
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<td>Mon - Nov. 10</td>
<td>Music and Film</td>
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<td>Wed – Nov. 12</td>
<td>Cognitive Benefits</td>
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<td>Mon - Nov. 17</td>
<td>Social Functions – Presentation on Cross-Cultural Differences</td>
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<td>Wed - Nov. 19</td>
<td>Musical Preferences</td>
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<td>Mon - Nov. 24</td>
<td>Musical Preferences – Presentation on Music and Political Thought</td>
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<td>Wed – Nov. 26</td>
<td>Musical Preferences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon - Dec. 1</td>
<td>Musical Preferences – Presentation on Music and Autobiographical Memory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed - Dec. 3</td>
<td>Research Proposal Due – Applied Psychomusicology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon - Dec. 8</td>
<td>Applied Psychomusicology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed – Dec. 10</td>
<td>Applied Psychomusicology – Presentation on Music and Exercise</td>
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