

# **Analysis of Post-Tonal Music (MUSI 6306)**

## **Spring 2006**

### **Professor: Andrew Davis** ([email](#))

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#### **Home page and syllabus**

#### **Professor: Andrew Davis.**

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#### **Course information:**

- MUSI 6306, Analysis of Post-Tonal Music
- Monday and Wednesday, 2:00 p.m. –3:30 p.m.
- course web site (this page): <http://www.uh.edu/~adavis5/musi6306>
- This is a course that explores (1) various theoretical approaches to post-tonal music and what they tell us about this music, and (2) various repertoires and musical-aesthetic movements from the post-tonal era and what to say about them analytically. The course is divided into five main topic areas: (1) music from the early-twentieth century on the brink of atonality; (2) free atonal music and the classic pitch-class set theory of Allen Forte; (3) 12-tone music and serialism; (4) the transformational theory of David Lewin; and (5) linear analysis and voice-leading approaches to post-tonal music (theories of James Baker, Joseph Straus, and Allen Forte). Regular reading assignments from the theoretical and historical literature will help explain the music and the theory, and help put it all into historical context. A series of smaller essay assignments supplement a class presentation given in the last four weeks of the semester and an analytical term paper due at the end of the semester.

#### **Prerequisites:**

You must have completed an undergraduate music theory and history curriculum (or demonstrated equivalent competency).

#### **Materials:**

- All scores will be handed out in class and are available for printing on the course web site (links on the course schedule page).
- You are responsible for locating and photocopying all reading assignments from materials placed on reserve for the course in the music library.
- Reading assignments and scores draw heavily from three sources, each of which is readily available for purchase (if you should want to do so) from the standard online booksellers:. Each is also available on reserve in the music library.

1. Mary H. Wennerstrom, *Anthology of Twentieth-Century Music*, 2d ed. (Prentice-Hall, 1987)
2. Charles Burkhart, *Anthology for Musical Analysis, Anthology for Musical Analysis*, 6th ed. (Wadsworth, 2003)
3. Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Music*, 2d ed. (Prentice-Hall, 2000—the third edition of this book is available, but all page numbers on the course schedule refer to the 2d edition, and the 2d edition is available in our library).

### **You will be evaluated on the following:**

1. Your participation in the class discussions and the degree to which you demonstrate you have completed the required listening and reading assignments. You **MUST** come to class familiar with the material and ready to discuss it.
  2. Three essay assignments.
  3. One class presentation.
  4. One term paper.
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### **Essay assignments:**

The essay assignments are intended to make you think critically and analytically about the post-tonal repertoire, and formulate your ideas in coherent prose. You should not think of these as having “answers” for which I am looking, and you should certainly think even less about the possibility of there being a “right” and a “wrong” way to approach these. Simply read the guidelines, then write an essay in which you tell me something interesting and intelligent about the music under consideration. You might think in terms of teaching the music to a student: what would you say to someone who knows music and music theory, but might not know much about this music, its construction, and its context?

**Essay 1.** Write an essay of around 4 pages in length in which you compare and contrast two pieces from the unit “music on the brink of atonality.” The choice of pieces is up to you, within these constraints: (1) choose pieces we discussed in class; (2) choose one piece from the list of music for 01/18 and 01/23, and choose the other from the list of music for 01/25 and 01/30; and (3) in the list for 01/18 and 01/23, do not use the Brahms “O Tod, o Tod.” Your comparison should focus on the use of tonality in each piece. Specifically: (1) how do the composers establish tonality? (2) how do the composers thwart or work against the projection of tonality? (3) how might the aesthetic aims of the composers and their attitude toward tonality and the tonal conventions be similar or different? Refer as necessary and in appropriate detail to the score and to musical and analytical examples of your choice.

**Essay 2.** Write an essay of around 4 pages in length in which you use classic pitch-class set theory to inform and enhance a discussion of Schoenberg's procedures in *Pierrot Lunaire* no. 1 (“Mondestrunken”) and one of the *Six Little Pieces for Piano* op. 19, either nos. 2, 4, or 6. Your essay should address: (1) what might the pc-set-theory approach tell us about these pieces that we might not have realized without it? (2) what is traditional and what is untraditional about these pieces (Schoenberg claimed he was a “traditional” composer in most respects)? (2) how is Schoenberg's approach to or attitude toward the common-practice conventions evident—and how is it similar or different—in each piece? Refer as necessary and in appropriate detail to the score and to musical and analytical examples of your choice.


**Essay 3.** Write an essay of around 4 pages in length in which you compare and contrast compositional procedures in Webern, Concerto for Nine Instruments op. 24, mvt. I (discussed in class) and either Berg, "Schliesse mir die Augen beide" (the 1925 setting) or Schoenberg, Theme from the Variations for Orchestra op. 31. I have provided copies of the row forms used in each piece. Your essay should address: (1) the row forms in each piece: how do they compare, are there special features of the rows, do these features have implications in the musical setting, does the composer exploit any of these features in obvious ways? (2) the deployment of the row in the music: how does each composer do it, what is similar or different about their procedures, to what degree does the row control the audible musical surface, and are there any interesting features of the way the composer has used the row to construct the piece? and (3) how is the attitude of each composer toward either the common-practice conventions or the aesthetics of the 12-tone movement evident—and how is it similar or different—in each piece; what is "traditional" about each piece and what is not; and how do all these factors effect how we might experience and understand the piece in a concert setting (i.e., how do they bear on its effect in the concert hall?); and how is each composer treating such basic aesthetic principles as control over music content, total chromatic saturation, and other issues that might be relevant? Refer as necessary and in appropriate detail to the score and to musical and analytical examples of your choice.

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## **Final paper and presentation:**

### **Final paper.**

**You are required to turn in a paper of around 15 pages in length on Wednesday 03 May by 4:00 p.m. (NOT later than this without penalty of one letter grade per day).**

Regarding the topic: This is up to you, but it should not directly reiterate material discussed in class (though it can be related to what we do in class, or an application of analytical approaches we explore in class), and you should follow these guidelines. First choose a piece or part of a piece (e.g., Alban Berg, *Wozzeck* Act III), or a few pieces by one composer (e.g., Schoenberg, *Six Little Piano Pieces* op. 19, nos. 2, 4, and 6), or a few pieces from a single musical-aesthetic movement by selected composers in that movement (i.e. minimalism, or music of Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass), or a theoretical approach (i.e., interval cycles in post-tonal music), or an important or seminal source (or several sources) on the analysis of post-tonal music (e.g., Arthur Berger, "Problems of Pitch Organization in Stravinsky"). For help in choosing a topic based on these guidelines, see my  ["additional topics and sources for the paper."](#)

Then write a paper in which you use this topic as a point of departure. If you choose a piece or part of a piece, or a few pieces from one composer, or a few pieces from a musical-aesthetic movement: what is interesting or important about the music of the movement you have chosen to write about, and what can you say (or what do you need to say) about it analytically in order for us to understand it better? If you choose a theoretical approach, what do we need to know in order for this approach to be useful, who are the main proponents or developers of the approach, when and how did it develop, to what music does it most readily apply, and what kinds of applications of the approach can you show? If you choose a source, think in terms of offering a critique of the author's analysis followed by your own application of the same analytical procedures or points to repertoire the author does not discuss; how does the source

help you understand the repertoire explicitly discussed in it, and how would it help you understand other music not considered by the author? Keep in mind that the paper should be analytical in nature rather than historical, although certainly historical context is crucial for understanding any analysis of post-tonal music; be careful to choose a topic about which you can write analytically, or about which there is analytical literature to which you can refer.

**Submit a topic to me by Wednesday 08 March** (the last class meeting before spring break), and do not change your topic after this date. This allows three weeks to prepare before the first class presentations begin (see below on presentations). Submit the topic in an email in which you describe in as much detail as possible what you will write about; at the very least you must provide the name of the piece, pieces, composer, movement, theoretical approach, or source you will write about, and complete citations for at least two additional sources to which you will refer to help you write the paper. Your final paper grade will be lowered for submitting an incomplete or late proposal.

### **Class presentation.**

Class meetings in weeks 12, 13, and 14 will be devoted to class presentations in which you present to the class the work you've been doing for your term paper. Think in terms of teaching the class about your music, composer, movement, theoretical approach, or source. You should prepare handouts, recordings, score examples, and/or transparencies or other graphic images as necessary to effectively communicate your ideas. I'm happy to help you prepare these materials if necessary, and if you provide me enough advance notice. The presentation serves 2 purposes: 1) it allows you to get feedback on the work you've been doing (and it makes you have it prepared earlier than you otherwise would), and 2) it increases the number of topics and concepts we get to discuss in class.

On scheduling presentations: I'll give you the option to sign up for one of the time slots in the first week (week 12); after that I'll assign presentation dates based on a random lottery. I'd like to have 2 presentations per class period, so you should think of your presentation in terms of a half-hour (**maximum**) time slot, allowing time for me and your classmates to ask questions about your work. Please ensure that you can give the presentation in 30 minutes—we'll have to cut you off if you go longer.

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### **Grading:**

Your grade will be computed as follows: class participation, 20% | essay assignments, 30% | class presentation, 20% | term paper, 30%.

The final grade is assigned according to the standard scale of percentages: A: 92.5–100 | A-: 90.0–92.5 | B+: 87.5–90.0 | B: 82.5–87.5 | B-: 80.0–82.5 | C+: 77.5–80.0 | C: 72.5–77.5 | C-: 70.0–72.5 | D+: 67.5–70.0 | D: 62.5–67.5 | D-: 60.0–62.5 | F: below 60.0

### **Academic dishonesty:**

You are expected to do your own work on all assignments and exams unless instructed differently; any work you hand in at any time should be your own. Problems with academic dishonesty will be handled according to the procedures outlined in the student handbook (see <http://www.uh.edu/dos/hdbk/acad/achonpol.html>). Please note that the mere suspicion of academic dishonesty is enough to initiate official action; please do not put yourself in the position of having to deal with this kind of situation.

**Disabilities:**

If you have a disability that affects your capacity to complete assignments and exams in a timely manner, please inform me at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made. You will need to document your disability with the UH Center for Students with Disabilities (see <http://www.uh.edu/csd/>). The CSD will provide me with information on your disability, and you and I will work out a mutually agreeable arrangement (based on recommendations provided by the CSD) for how to accommodate the disability.

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