

Modern Music Survey: Final Project

One way to understand any kind of music is to analyze it by using a blend of tools/vocabulary appropriate to the conditions under which the music was composed, and the perspective of your own understanding and experience – a mix of the objective and subjective. This allows one to appreciate the music's origins along with its current and at least personal relevance.

Another way to understand music, after doing some form of the above, is to compose something in the same based on the above variables. This allows you to engage with the creative dimension of the process and “walk in the shoes” of the composer(s). This will also help you hear the music in a way more aligned with the composer’s experience.

For a final class project, prepare an approximately 10 minute presentation on a piece you have analyzed, or one recently composed as one of the suggested assignments.

Analysis

Choose a short piece that relates to one of the topics we discussed. If you can get a score (I can help you), it may be helpful for the presentation, but not necessary. For the given topic, be able to show specific examples of a particular technique. Most pieces will feature a mix of techniques (Bartók comes to mind, with his interest in both rhythm and modality), but try to find an example where a particular technique is especially salient. In addition to using a score, you might want to transcribe/annotate-separately particular passages that support what you are hearing. Be prepared for Q & A.

Working with one of the pieces we’ve already listened to (at a cursory level) is fine if you feel you can go into it in more detail. There are many short pieces by Satie, Bartók, Dallapiccola and Ligeti that would work well for this assignment.

Topics to consider include:

- Modality
- Atonality (including 12-tone)
- Polytonality
- Rhythm (including syncopation and polyrhythm)
- Texture
- Energy/volume
- Reinterpretation & Improvisation (including aleatoric/chance music)

Synthesis

Take one of the composition assignments you did for this class (reworked/revised if you wish) and present it: play a recording; explain how you composed it; provide an annotated score; cite any influences; relate it to one of the syllabus’ categorical topics; be prepared for Q & A.

For either of these, please let me know what you plan to do and let me know how I can help. I want this to be an especially meaningful and intensive experience, so if you are able to share any rough drafts ahead of time, I will try to give constructive feedback.