

# LONGY

School of Music of Bard College

## ID 510 A: JUST LISTEN COURSE SYLLABUS SPRING 2023

**Instructor:** Dr. John H. Morrison

**Office:** none

**Class website:** <http://jhmedu.org/JLclass/>

**Office Hours:** Tuesday, Thursday noon – 12:45 in L-10

**Contact info:**

E-mail: [john.morrison@longy.edu](mailto:john.morrison@longy.edu) (preferred method of contact)

Teams: chat in class channel (less dependable for quick response)

Cell phone: 617 223 1689 (for use in case of immediate need for response)

**Credit Hours:** 1

**Meeting Time:** Friday 9:00-9:55

Online readings:

*The Power of Not Knowing*, by Srinivasan Pillay ([Huffington Post](#))

*The Zen of Not Knowing*, by Zenkei Blanche Hartman ([Tricycle](#))

*Not-knowing and creative insight*, by Heather Dyer ([Contemplative Pedagogy Network](#))

*SEA: Finding Common Ground for a Global Analytical Method*, by John Morrison ([personal site](#))

## COURSE DESCRIPTION, RATIONALE, AND GOALS

In this course, students will engage in techniques that allow them to engage with what they fear, dislike, know a lot about or nothing about, and discover what the bringer of fear actually holds for them. Many of us are afraid of not knowing enough about a musical style (especially new or experimental music), and therefore do not expose ourselves to experiences which would actually provide experiential knowledge and reduce the fear. Others of us allow what we do know about music to blind ourselves to the truth that lies beyond or amidst what we think we know. Through a series of listening experiences in and out of class, students will learn to honestly and openly engage with musical styles they have avoided, and discover the joy of letting go of prejudice of all sorts.

The title, *Just Listen*, comes from a workshop ([Just Listening](#)) developed by JHM that attempts to produce an experience of “beginner’s mind”, the state of mind promoted by Zen meditation in which the true nature of a phenomenon is grasped because the knowing mind ceases to interfere with what one is doing. For musicians, this state offers many benefits. A primary one we will explore is how it allows what we deeply know to come forward when we need it, and to observe how our expectations of what “should” happen in music interferes with our listening. The fact is, it is impossible to know what the outcome of this process will be for class members: it is the purpose of the class to follow our intuitions as we encounter music that we don’t know, find what we find about it, learn to appreciate if not love it through direct experience. Readings early in the semester will help establish the somewhat slippery concept, and then a series of encounters with music both in and out of class combined with journaling about the developing experience will take us to the end of the semester. At semester’s end, each of us will summarize our experiences through the listening and journaling in a final, reflective paper.

The entire concept grows out of an analytical procedure known as the Sound-Energy Aggregate, and though it will go almost unseen, our work in open-minded listening will utilize the method.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

The primary requirements for the class are steady attendance and spirited participation in all activities. Given that the point is to observe our own reactions to music, there is really nothing to do wrong except to fail to be honest and forthright about your reactions! Your reactions are your reactions, and the value they have for the class is that you share them with us. Bring the same spirit of participation expected in class to your homework, and you will be on the right track.

There will be some kind of assignment every week, either reading or listening, sometimes locating a selection to bring to class, and always involving journaling (writing your thoughts and impressions about the reading or music.) Keep your journal entries together, either in a composition book, folder, or binder, and upload a pdf of your journal entry in Assignments of Teams each week. The grade for those is pass-fail: if you do the journaling, you get credit, it doesn't matter what you write! Of course it matters what you write in some ways, and the main way we will have it matter is that you will use your journal entries from the semester to write your final paper. The paper, described more fully below, is intended to get you to think about the ways in which your listening to music has been affected by the work we have done, and about the ways in which "not knowing" might be valuable to you as a musician and teacher.

Throughout the semester, we will bring in musical selections to challenge ourselves, and to use for the Just Listening process. In those cases, we will likely discuss what makes the music challenging for a person, and find out how others perceive it. Issues and difficulties are certain to occur to us in applying the process, one of which will be dealing with music that has words. Encountering such things is what the course is all about, and our learning about how to apply the concepts of [Just Listening](#) with varied musical styles and issues is the intended outcome, whether that be purely personal or in a social setting.

## RESPECT for DIVERSITY

Longy is an institution where students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives are welcomed and respected, and where the diversity students bring is viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. In this course, it is my intent to present repertoire, materials and activities that are inclusive and respectful of diversity.

## STUDENT OUTCOMES

At the end of the semester, a student will be able:

- to listen openly and non-judgmentally to unfamiliar music.
- to penetrate the surface of a composition through repeated listening and identify the primary factors which determine its shape and impact.
- to explain reactions to music through observations about the musical parameters which create them.
- understand that the same stimuli often produce differing reactions in listeners.
- to articulate insights about the process of encountering music..
- to gain deeper insight, understanding, and appreciation of music from any style or period.

## EVALUATION

Grades will be assigned weekly, evaluating the level of engagement with the work underway in class. Journal entries are pass-fail. Presentation grades will depend upon how fully one engages in the process.

The final grade will be determined as below:

regular attendance:	10%
steady participation in class:	20%
steady entries in journal:	40%
presentations:	20%
final paper:	10%

## ATTENDANCE AND MAKEUPS

Students are allowed at most two absences in the course of the semester. Additional absences will result in the loss of a letter grade per absence from what would have been one's grade. If one is due to present in class on a given day, it is essential that one follow through on the obligation. If an emergency arises and you must be absent on a day you are to present, please call the cell phone listed above to inform JHM of your absence. We will do our best to allow a presentation to be made up. Missing a presentation without notification will result in a failing grade (F) on that assignment with no recourse to a makeup.

## INCOMPLETE POLICY

An incomplete will not be given primarily to allow a student to raise their grade to a passing grade for the course.

## COURSE OUTLINE

While all effort will be applied to maintain the schedule outlined below, it is always possible to fall behind or realize it is not necessary to go as slowly as planned. The class approach to particular pieces might be adjusted according to the success or failure of previous approaches. A larger class population may alter the number and scope of presentations.

<u>date</u>	<u>class activities</u>
January 20	intro, read syllabus, expose idea of SEA and beginner's mind
27	no class
February 3	discuss readings; class experience in Just Listening (modern classical music)
10	class experience in Just Listening (Persian music)
17	discuss assigned example (homework) brainstorming for musical types for use in class: what kinds of music do you not like? • in-class experience with some examples that may fit the bill
24	listening and discussion of examples, discuss assigned example
March 3	listening and discussion of examples, discuss assigned example
10	listening and discussion of examples, discuss assigned example
17	no class (spring break)
March 24	<b>Presentations</b>
31	<b>Presentations</b>
April 7	<b>Presentations</b>
14	<b>Presentations</b>
21	<b>Presentations</b>
28	<b>Wrap-up class/Presentations</b>
May 5	<b>Final paper due</b>

## ASSIGNMENTS

Greater levels of detail for assignments will be provided as needed. The information provided here is to assist in your planning. Please take note that assignments are listed by due date.

<u>due date</u>	<u>assignment</u>
2/3	<b>online readings:</b> <i>The Power of Not Knowing</i> , by Srinivasan Pillay ( <a href="https://www.huffingtonpost.com/srinivasan-pillay/not-knowing_b_881837.html">https://www.huffingtonpost.com/srinivasan-pillay/not-knowing_b_881837.html</a> ) <i>The Zen of Not Knowing</i> , by Zenkei Blanche Hartman ( <a href="https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/zen-not-knowing/">https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/zen-not-knowing/</a> ) <i>Not-knowing and creative insight</i> , by Heather Dyer

(<https://contemplativepedagogynetwork.com/2018/11/28/not-knowing-and-creative-insight/>)

**journal entry:** write a paragraph or so about what this reading makes you think about your own relationship to listening

**upload pdf** of your journal entry to Teams: Assignments

2/10

**read JHM paper:**

*SEA: Finding Common Ground for a Global Analytical Method*

([http://jhmedu.org/SEA/resources/SEA\\_2017.01.02.pdf](http://jhmedu.org/SEA/resources/SEA_2017.01.02.pdf))

**journal entry:** write a paragraph about what this reading makes you think about musical listening and analysis

**upload pdf** of your journal entry to Teams: Assignments

2/17

**1) locate a selection of music** of a type that you like but that you think others might not, bring a recording or a link to a recording that we can use in class (these recordings will be used for future homework and in-class work)

**2) Listen and Journal:**

**listen repeatedly** to the example designated by JHM, and **journal** about your listening as prompted below (at the end of the assignment list)

**upload pdf** of your journal entry to Teams: Assignments

2/24

**Listen and Journal:**

**listen repeatedly** to the example designated by JHM, and journal about your listening as prompted below, Listen and Journal instructions (at the end of the assignment list)

**upload pdf** of your journal entry to Teams: Assignments

3/3

**Listen and Journal:**

**listen repeatedly** to the example designated by JHM, and journal about your listening as prompted below

**upload pdf** of your journal entry to Teams: Assignments

3/10

**Listen and Journal:** video version (see slightly altered format below)

**listen repeatedly** to the example designated by JHM, and journal about your listening as prompted below, Listen and Journal video instructions (at the end of the assignment list)

**upload pdf** of your journal entry to Teams: Assignments

3/17

**no class** (spring break)

3/24

**Listen and Journal:** video version (see slightly altered format below)

**listen repeatedly** to the example designated by JHM, and journal about your listening as prompted below, Listen and Journal video instructions (at the end of the assignment list)

**upload pdf** of your journal entry to Teams: Assignments

4/3-28

**Presentations:**

The description below should guide you in bringing a selection to class that will stimulate discussion. If you are not presenting on a given day, then you have no other assignment.

4/28

**Wrap up semester**

We will use the last week to bring together impressions from the semester, and help class members prepare for and develop their final paper concepts.

5/5

**Final paper due**

Submit to Teams by class time (see description below).

**(Assignment descriptions follow on next page)**

## Listen and Journal steps:

We may modify this process as the semester goes on. Use it for the first few weekly assignments.

1. Listen to the example once.
  - (a) Write a brief entry that addresses these questions:
    - i. What in the music caught your attention (attracted or repelled you)?
    - ii. What details do you remember after the first listen?
    - iii. What energies do you perceive, how would you describe them?
2. Listen again
  - (a) Another brief entry, addressing these questions:
    - i. How did your impression of the music change on second hearing?
    - ii. What in the music caught your attention this time?
    - iii. What details do you remember this time?
    - iv. How has your perception of the energies changed?
    - v. What in the music is causing your reaction, your assessment?
3. repeat the listen-respond cycle (i.e., step 2) until you have listened a total of at least four times, then:
  - (a) Write a summary of the experience in your journal, taking special note of how your perception of the music shifted with repeated listenings.
  - (b) Draw a diagram of the musical shape you perceive, tracing either its overall energy or some other outstanding parameter (volume, density, tempo, etc.) that gives it shape.

## Listen and Journal video instructions

For this assignment, we will attempt to observe the impact of video on our listening experience. To do that, please follow these steps:

1. For the first listening, listen only, do not watch the video. (Do your best, it's OK if you see the very start; you can just close your eyes and listen.). Then answer the normal questions:
  - Write a brief entry that addresses these questions:
    - What in the music caught your attention (attracted or repelled you)?
    - What details do you remember after the first listen?
    - What energies do you perceive, how would you describe them?
2. Listen again
  - Another brief entry, addressing these questions:
    - How did your impression of the music change on second hearing?
    - What in the music caught your attention this time?
    - What details do you remember this time?
    - How has your perception of the energies changed?
    - What in the music is causing your reaction, your assessment?
3. For the third listening, also watch the video. Now, write in your journal about these questions:
  - What do you remember now?
  - Is it the music or the images you remember, or is it a combination?
  - Explore this thought a bit.
4. For the final listening, watch again, and write in your journal about these questions:
  - How has your memory of the music shifted now?
  - How about your attitude towards what you are hearing?
  - Has seeing the video altered your listening experience in a noticeable way?
  - Write a little about these questions.

(continued)

## **Presentations description**

While there are several ways to manage the presentation online (see below), a presentation in any form should include playing a recording and showing a score (if that suits the music you are presenting), displaying and explaining a graphic representation (diagram) of the energy profile of the selection (i.e., a diagram) and more generally introducing the music. One should explain how one perceives the flow of musical energy to work in the passage, and provide a graphic representation of the energy profile of the selection. And tell us, please, what challenges you (as a listener) about this particular passage.

Play the example at least once to demonstrate your points, or if you wish, play the selection several times, taking us through a process of discovery through repeated listenings. Since class meetings allow us to speak about what we have experienced, you might pose questions that arise from engaging with the music to stir further and deeper thoughts on the music.

In choosing music, select a reasonably brief passage of something that lends itself to such analysis. Any kind of music will be fine, but it matches the intent of the class best if we choose music that challenges us in some way.

The amount of time each person has for presenting depends on the number of people in class. The duration will be figured at least the week before you need to be ready to present. Of the total duration, about 1/3 of the time should be devoted to one's presentation, allowing the remainder of the time for the class to dig into the music together.

Presentations may be delivered in real time with the help of sharing pdfs and playing recordings, Powerpoint/Keynote presentations of material with live commentary, or a video which might incorporate Powerpoint/Keynote or live commentary and document sharing that you have recorded.

## **Final Paper description**

The final paper will be a summary of the experiences you have had in completing the reading and listening journals. Describe as best you can the ways in which your thinking has shifted as you encountered music that you did not know before, had misgivings or dislike for, etc. Consider also the social communities that produce the musical examples, and whether your experience with some of those has altered or informed your feelings toward those communities.

More ideas on what to address with the paper way well emerge during the semester, and this description may be updated by semester's end.

Length: 500-1500 words

due May 5 at class time (no class meeting planned to occur, but we could collectively change our minds)