

**LONGY SCHOOL OF MUSIC OF BARD COLLEGE  
TH542A: TOPICS IN ANALYSIS  
TWENTIETH CENTURY STRING QUARTET AND SEA  
COURSE SYLLABUS  
SPRING 2019**

Instructor: Dr. John H. Morrison  
Office: none  
E-mail: john.morrison@longy.edu  
Office Hour: Wednesdays, 11:00-12:00, Room 9  
Credit Hours: 2  
Meeting Time: 9:00-10:55 Wednesday  
Meeting location: Room 10

Reserve scores:

Bartok: String Quartet Nos. 3 (1927)  
Ruth Crawford Seeger: String Quartet 1931 (1931)  
Ligeti: String Quartet No. 2 (1968)  
Volans: White Man Sleeps (1982)  
Reich: Different Trains (1988)  
Kaija Saariaho: Nymphéa (1987)  
Harrison Birtwistle: 9 Movements For String Quartet ('91-96)  
John Adams: String Quartet No. 1 (2008)  
Kevin Puts: Credo (2007)  
Missy Mazzoli: Death Valley Junction (2010)  
Nico Muhly: Diacritical Marks (2011)  
Derek Bermel: Intonations (2016)

Reserve texts:

Berry, Wallace: *Form in Music* (on reserve for Form and Analysis)  
Cowell, Henry: *New musical resources*  
Green, Douglass M.: *Form in Tonal Music* (on reserve for Form and Analysis)  
Persichetti, Vincent: *Twentieth-century harmony*

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION, RATIONALE, AND GOALS**

The course will provide a vehicle for the close study of a sampling of string quartets spanning from the twentieth into the twenty-first century. We will apply an analytical technique known as the Sound Energy Aggregate (SEA) throughout the semester, employing varied configurations of our constituency to approach the music. The technique is one which attempts to account for the role of all musical parameters in building up the composite impact – the emotional profile or sound energy aggregate – of a piece. While never negating the importance of pitch in creating that impact, the technique rather elevates other parameters to their rightful place alongside pitch as powerful messengers of musical energy.

While obviously seeking to illuminate the string quartet literature of the last century, the course has an equally important goal of providing a meaningful, comprehensive approach to the study of modern music in general. And a subtext which flows through all of our analysis will be to discover and share compositional strategies that we discover in the pieces.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES**

It is recommended that groups of students purchase the scores to reduce the cost of the course per individual. If at all possible, one should purchase a set for oneself, as the scores will be a great asset in the future. All scores that we will use should be on reserve in the library.

While the course will feature some traditional lecture approach, we will function mostly in a cooperative learning,

seminar format. The success of such a course in imparting learning rests entirely on the work one puts into the process. We will all analyze the same pieces early in the semester, laying the groundwork for use of SEA principles. Then, in week 4, we will devote a day to first-round SEA analysis of three quartets, an activity which will provide us with avenues of exploration for those pieces. The next three weeks will be devoted to analyzing the three works, using class time to share the results of our explorations together and attempt to forge a comprehensive analysis of each. We will repeat the process of listening to multiple pieces and doing early analysis of three to four pieces in one session, followed by group work and presentation of findings in the succeeding two classes. These presentations are intended to be as much stimulus to class engagement and analysis as presentations *per se*. We will close the semester with one more round of multiple listenings and classes devoted to presenting and analyzing further together.

A certain number of essays will be assigned (2 planned at this time, see outline below), requiring that one pull together elements from class discussions and one's own analysis to create a more personal view of the piece in question. A final paper (really a final essay) will be due at class time during the first week after classes end. Essay guidelines are provided later in the syllabus.

It cannot be overemphasized that the class is mostly about the work each individual contributes: the teacher is a guide and collaborator, not a disseminator of data!

## EVALUATION

Grades will be assigned weekly, estimating each student's effort and success at dealing with the materials, both in sense of the analytical technique and the music studied. Essay grades will account for the quality of one's analysis, as might be expected, but will also be derived from an evaluation of one's writing. Presentation grades will depend upon how successfully a group manages to meet the criteria to be outlined, and may include a degree of both self-evaluation and evaluation of the contributions of group members.

The final grade will be determined as below:

Weekly work:	30%
Essay average:	20%
Presentation/engagement:	30%
Final paper:	20%

## GRADING SCALE

Numerals in parentheses indicate value assigned to letter grades when computing averages.

A	94-100	(97)	C	73-76	(75)
A-	90-93	(92)	C-	70-72	(71)
B+	87-89	(88)	D+	65-69	(67)
B	83-86	(85)	D	60-64	(62)
B-	80-82	(81)	F	0-59	(50)
C+	77-79	(78)			

## COURSE OUTLINE, ASSIGNMENTS

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 material described on a particular day constitutes the assignment and our principal task for the class meeting.

- January 16 intro, read syllabus, expose idea of SEA  
homework: read "[SEA: Finding Common Ground for a Global Analytical Method](#)"
- 23 in class: SEA analysis of (part of) Bartok String Quartet #3  
homework: analysis of Ligeti String Quartet #2, movements 3 and 5
- 30 in class: discuss Ligeti #2, share insights, prepare for writing essay, make diagrams  
homework: essay on Ligeti

## Essay due: Ligeti 2

### Essay guidelines: Ligeti String Quartet #2

Gathering together your observations and those made by others during class discussions, put together a two-page, typed paper which proposes a large-scale view of one of the movements studied that will introduce and explain an attached diagram of the piece. The paper and diagram should articulate the interaction of three or four most important parameters, demonstrating clearly the formal divisions in the music based on those features.

Two pages leaves little room for detailed description! Be concise in your language, incisive in your observations, precise in constructing the diagram. The paper should be, in a sense, a frame for an argument you could present more fully in more ample space. This is not an invitation to make wild, unsupported claims, however. If you have a unique idea to present, realize that you must spend an adequate amount of space defending and illuminating the source of that view in the music.

The essay is due at class time on February 6.

February 6 in class:

- listening and first-level SEA analysis of quartets by Volans, Saariaho, and Reich
- determine parameters for exploration in each piece
- determine what each individual will study of those parameters identified

homework: analysis of the parameters determined for *White Man Sleeps* by Volans

13 in class: Volans sharing of insights and fascinations, forging of analysis and diagram

homework: analysis of the parameters determined for *Nymphéa* by Saariaho

20 in class: Saariaho sharing of insights and fascinations, forging of analysis and diagram

homework: analysis of the parameters determined for *Different Trains* by Reich

27 in class: Reich sharing of insights and fascinations, forging of analysis and diagram

homework: none!

March 6 in class:

- listening and first-level SEA analysis of quartets by Birtwistle, Seeger, Adams, Puts
- determine parameters for exploration in each piece
- determine who works on which piece
- determine what each individual will study of those parameters identified

homework: one group prepares to present/engage class with their assigned piece

### **Presentation/class engagement guidelines:**

The idea is that a group will present to the class their findings about the piece studied, specifically dealing with SEA principles. Sections of the piece, subsections, why they hold together and what their energy vector is: all are expected for mention and consideration. Dividing up parameters among the group so that efforts complement rather than overlap is important. Devising some sort of diagram is helpful, and providing them as handouts is advisable.

Plan for the presentation of materials, energies, diagrams, fascinations to consume about one-half to two-thirds of the two hours of class, and the remainder to provoke deeper engagement with your piece with the rest of the class. This might be to play a short segment and ask for responses to questions you have come upon, study of a particularly interesting spot in the score, or just opening the floor to questions about what you have presented.

The grade depends upon the quality of analysis and presentation, and the degree to which you engage the class in discussion of the piece.

- 13 in class: group presents findings and insights into their piece, spurs discussion and exploration more deeply into some aspect of the piece  
homework: the other group prepares to present/engage class with their assigned piece
- 20 no class
- 27 in class: group presents findings and insights into their piece, spurs discussion and exploration more deeply into some aspect of the piece  
homework: essay on Volans, Saariaho, or Reich

**Essay due: Saariaho, Ligeti, Reich**

Essay guidelines:

In a relatively brief paper (two to four double-spaced, typed pages), devise and explore a focused topic related to the Sound-Energy Aggregate concept in one of the quartets listed. If so moved, you may write on a SEA topic that provides insight into all three or two of the three pieces. Keep the discussion tied to your thesis, and provide as an appendix a diagram which highlights the operation or presence of that thesis through the piece(s).

The essay is due at class time on April 3.

- April 3 in class:
- listening and first-level SEA analysis of quartets by Mazzoli, Muhly, Bermel, another?
  - determine parameters for exploration in each piece
  - determine who works on which piece
  - determine what each individual will study of those parameters identified
- homework: one group prepares to present/engage class with their assigned piece
- 10 in class: group presents findings and insights into their piece, spurs discussion and exploration more deeply into some aspect of the piece  
homework: the other group prepares to present/engage class with their assigned piece
- 17 in class: group presents findings and insights into their piece, spurs discussion and exploration more deeply into some aspect of the piece

- April 22 final paper due

**Final essay due:**

Essay guidelines:

In a relatively brief paper (two to four double-spaced, typed pages), devise and explore a focused topic related to the Sound-Energy Aggregate concept in one of the last group of quartets (Mazzoli, Muhly, Bermel). If so moved, you may write on a SEA topic that provides insight into all three or two of the three pieces. Keep the discussion tied to your thesis, and provide as an appendix a diagram which highlights the operation or presence of that thesis through the piece(s).

The essay is due at class time on April 22.