

## MUS470s/EAS 470s: Nature and Ritual in Asian Music

*Session:* M/W 1:00-2:15PM

*Phone:* 404-727-3835

*Classroom:* BRB 107

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**Course description:** this is a seminar for upper-division undergraduates and will explore aspects of nature and ritual in various Asian musical traditions and contemporary adaptation and transformation of such traditions. In the first part, we will examine how vocal styles and musical instruments used in ritualistic contexts in Asian cultures symbolize different aspects of nature and cosmological principles associated with Buddhism, Shintô religion, Shaminism, Hinduism, and Taoism. The musical traditions and practices we will study in this course include, but will not be limited to: *gagaku* (court-music tradition of Japan), *shômyô* (Buddhist chanting), shakuhachi (Zen Buddhism), *a-ak* (Korean court music), *pansori* (Korean shamanistic vocal recitation), *kecak* (Balinese monkey dance), Balinese *kebyar* gamelan, ceremonial music of Tibetan Buddhism, and Indian Vedic chanting. Music used in such ritualistic contexts often serves as a tool for participants to develop deeper awareness of their connections with nature, environment, and religion or spiritual practice. In the second part, we will explore the various ways in which traditional rituals are transformed by representative artists and composers in the postwar era. More specifically, we will examine how composers such as John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, Tôru Takemitsu, and Tan Dun, among others, have incorporated aspects of traditional ritual into their music in order to deepen their aesthetic awareness of natural elements and spiritual forces. As part of their final project, students will be given an opportunity to create a new ritual that incorporates aspects of nature, music, spirituality, and sustainability.

**Reading materials:** All announcements, assignments, and weekly reading materials (including audio and video excerpts) will be posted on Blackboard. Students are encouraged to submit response papers using the Digital Dropbox in Blackboard.

**Objectives and Assessment:** Students will be responsible for participating in class discussion on a regular basis, submitting response papers online by the prescribed due dates, delivering a 30-minute class presentation on a final project with a partner, and submitting a final paper on the topic of his/her choice.

Response papers: 5% x 8 = 40%

Blog entries: 10%

Class Participation: 10%

Group presentation: 15%

Final project/paper: 25%

**Response papers:** students will write a 3-4 page paper on assigned weekly readings, guest lecture, and/or audio-visual presentations. The instructor will provide key questions for the students to answer based on topics for class discussion.

**Group presentation:** students will work in a group of three to explore the use of music in a ritualistic context within the Atlanta community. As part of their project, they will interview

participants and (with permission granted) present a video presentation of the performance of ritual involving music.

**Blog entries:** students will provide two blog entries within the Blackboard site to share their comments on the two field trips we will take during the course of the semester.

**Final project/paper:** students will provide a 30-minute presentation on the topic of their final paper. Final paper will be approximately 15 pages in length and the topic may be based on further analysis of music and ritual. As an extension of this project, students will be given an opportunity to create his/her own ritual that incorporates aspects of nature, music, spirituality, and sustainability.

**Attendance Policy:** warning for failure will be given out to students who have missed more than three classes and two assignments within the first five weeks of class. After THREE unexcused absences, your cumulative grade for the course will drop by 5% per each additional absence. Absences can be excused only if accompanied by a note from a proper authority, e.g., medical doctor, parents, or major advisor. Chronic tardiness by more than 5 minutes will accumulate to one absence (2 tardiness = one unexcused absence).

## Weekly Syllabus

Week 1: What is ritual? Exploration of ritual in religious, ceremonial, and other social contexts  
Readings: Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (introduction); Five Elements and their cosmological symbolism (comparative study of Indian/Chinese/Japanese systems); Chen, "Theory and Notation in China."

### Traditional Asian Music and Rituals

Week 2: Tibetan Buddhism and ceremonial music

Reading: Helffer, "An Overview of Western Work on Ritual Music of Tibetan Buddhism"

Listening: *Tibetan Buddhist rites from the monasteries of Bhutan* (CD 3909)

Guest lecture: representative from The Drepung Loseling Monastery

*Response paper #1* (due week 3)

Week 3: Zen Buddhism; Japanese shōmyō (Buddhist chanting) and gagaku (court music)

Reading: Wade, *Music in Japan*; Kido, *shōmyō* (excerpts translated by Everett)

Watch: Gagaku: Imperial Household Agency (video)

*Response paper #2* (due week 4)

Week 4: Korean shaminism, p'unori, and a-ak

Reading: Mills, *Healing Rhythms* (chapter 2: P'unori—Musical Practice in Ritual;  
chapter 3: *Chiokka*/Hell Song—The Afterlife, Gods, Ghosts and Belief)

Listen: *Healing Rhythms* (CD)

Guest lecture: Tong Soon Lee

*Response paper #3* (due week 5)

Week 5: Taoist rituals and music in Shanxi

Reading: Jones, *Ritual and Music of North China* (chapter 2)

Watch: video excerpts on Burial Procession, Offerings, and Temple Fairs (Jones)

*Response paper #4* (due week 6)

Week 6: Balinese *ketcak* (monkey chants) and gamelan

Reading: Bakan, "Walking warriors"

Watch: Bali—Isle of Temples (DVD 7944)

Guest lecture: Michael Bakan (Florida State University)

*Response paper #5* (due week 7)

Week 7: Hindustani Indian sacred chant: Samaveda

Reading: Rowell, *Music and Musical Thought in Early India*; Wayne, *Samavedic Chant*; "Music and Accentuation in Vedic Literature"

Field trip: The Hindu Temple of Atlanta

*Blog entry #1* (due week 8)

Week 8: Group presentations [25 min. report on how music is used as ritual in communities within Atlanta]

### **Rituals in Contemporary Music and Culture**

Week 9: John Cage: 4'33"; Pauline Oliveros: *Sonic Meditations*

Readings: Cage, *Silence* (excerpts); Oliveros, "Improvisation in the Sonosphere."

*Response paper #6* (due week 10)

Watch and Listen: Oliveros, *Suspended Music* (CD 16830); *John Cage: From Zero* (DVD)

Improvisation exercise: Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations* (excerpts)

Week 10: Takemitsu: Japanese garden and sounds

Reading: Takemitsu, "Mirrors"; Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence* (excerpts); Everett and De Ferrenti: "Tôru Takemitsu on *Sawari*."

Watch: Takemitsu, *Dream Garden* (video)

Field trip: Nature walk

*Blog entry #2* (due week 11)

Week 11: George Crumb: *Vox Balanae* ("Song of the Whale"); Harry Partch, *Bewitched*

Readings: Adamenko, "George Crumb's channels of mythification"; Johnston, "The corporealism of Harry Partch."

Listen: *Vox Balanae* (CD); *Bewitched* (DVD)

*Response paper #7* (due week 12)

Week 12: Tan Dun's *Water Passion*; *Ghost Opera*; *The Map*

Readings: Young, "Reconsidering cultural politics in the analysis of contemporary Chinese Music"; Kouwenhoven, "Mainland China's new music."

Watch and Listen: *The Map* (DVD); *Ghost Opera* (DVD); *Water Passion* (CD)  
Response paper #8 (due week 13)

Weeks 13-15: Individual presentations

### Selected Bibliography

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- Bakan, Michael B. "Walking warriors: Battles of culture and ideology in the Balinese gamelan beleganjur world." *Ethnomusicology* 42/3 (1998): 441-484.
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- Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.
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- Jones, Stephen. *Ritual and Music of North China: Shawm Bands in Shanxi*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007.
- Johnston, Ben. "The Corporealism of Harry Partch." In *Maximum Clarity and Other Writings on Music*, ed. Bob Gilmore. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006, pp. 219-231.
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- Oliveros, Pauline. "Improvisation in the Sonosphere." *Contemporary Music Review* vol. 25/5-6 (2006): 481-482.
- Rowell, Lewis. *Music and Musical Thought in Early India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
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- Wade, Bonnie C. *Music in Japan: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Young, Samson. "Reconsidering cultural politics in the analysis of contemporary Chinese music: the case of Ghost opera." *Contemporary Music Review* XXVI/5-6 (2007): 605-618.