

Humanities Seminars Program

Beyond Brahms at the Piano: Listening to Modern Music

Dr. John Milbauer, Professor of Music

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The Course

Why is it that a staging of Eugene O'Neill is considered a "revival" that can run for months, a museum can curate a "retrospective" of artworks from the 1960s and expect lines around the block, but the majority of classical music after 1910 remains impenetrable, off-putting, and "modern" to audiences over a century later? The answer lies partially in the splintering of diverse and often arcane compositional languages throughout the 20th century, languages that can leave listeners flummoxed, irritated, and dissatisfied. In this class, Professor of Music and Steinway Artist John Milbauer will lead—from the piano bench—a sweeping tour of movements and compositional styles from the turn of the 20th century to the present, finding windows into understanding by linking newer composers with their better-known antecedents and by referencing visual arts, physics, literature, philosophy, dance, and history. How do Johannes Brahms and Sigmund Freud lead to Arnold Schoenberg and John Cage? If atonality and abstraction are analogous, why are they more celebrated in art than in music? Does Béla Bartók demonstrate a debt to Frédéric Chopin, do the paintings of Salvador Dalí help us to find meaning in the music of Toru Takemitsu, and—a question underlying all of this discussion—what is the relationship between the physical properties of sound and our reception of consonance and dissonance?

This course assumes no prior study of music or ability to read music; students who attended Dr. Don Traut's or Dr. Jay Rosenblatt's seminars on "common-era" music might be especially interested, as this class continues from where they end. Most music will be demonstrated on the piano in the classroom. Listening assignments will be supplemented by readings, though the focus in the classroom will be on *listening with understanding* by moving from the familiar to the remote each week with Dr. Milbauer, an enthusiastic and expert guide to this extraordinary repertoire.

Composers discussed will include but are not limited to: Adams, Bartók, Boulez, Brahms, Bresnick, Cage, Chopin, Crumb, Davidovsky, Debussy, Ives, Liszt, Poulenc, Rzewski, Scarlatti, Schoenberg, Takemitsu

Topics discussed: Modernism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Symbolism, Abstraction, Folkism, Serialism, Neo-Classicism, Dadaism, Exoticism, Orientalism, Primitivism, Surrealism, Minimalism, Aleatoricism, extended techniques, electronic music

Listening assignments will generally not exceed 60 minutes of music.

Reading assignments will be recommended and will not exceed ten pages per week.

The class time of 3 hours per week for 4 weeks includes two breaks, live performances by John Milbauer, colleagues, and students, and time for questions within each segment.

Recommended reading links will be added (some tagged specifically for those with music background), though the focus will be on listening assignments. The links below are to online recordings that are distinguished or particularly relevant. The class is welcome and encouraged to explore other recordings, as well.

Class 1: "Only a psychiatrist can help poor Schoenberg now."

- **Introduction**

- The "Emancipation of Dissonance"**

- From Johannes Brahms to Arnold Schoenberg

- ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:**

- Johannes **Brahms**, *Six Piano Pieces Op.119* (1893)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSf2veLfc-w>

- Alban **Berg**, *Sonata, Op. 1* (1910)

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqE5By_69OY

- Arnold **Schoenberg**, *Six Little Piano Pieces Op.19* (1911)

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cmWgll8T4c

- Sergei **Rachmaninoff** *Prelude Op.32 #5* (1910)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TAYfxgGNUk>

- Claude **Debussy**, "Canope" from *Préludes, Book II* (1913)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFVvA6kANI0>

- **"No, I will not be available at any time." —Arnold Schoenberg**

- From Schoenberg to John Cage

- ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:**

- Cage**, *Two Pieces* (1946)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5JaQnizkvg>

ADVANCE READING ASSIGNMENT:

Schoenberg, "How One Becomes Lonely" (to be uploaded, Dec. 2018)

NYT review related to the Schoenberg essay:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/14/arts/music/evolution-not-revolution-as-schoenberg-might-say.html>

A fine description of "Canope":

<https://stevedebussy.wordpress.com/2006/09/29/canope-preludes-book-ii-1913/>

Cage, excerpts from *Silence* (to be uploaded, Dec. 2018)

Class 2: "Let's leave...he's beginning to 'develop!'"

- **Debussy, or the "Emancipation of Dissonance" Part II**

From Frédéric **Chopin** to Claude **Debussy**

ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:

Frédéric **Chopin**, Mazurka in F Minor, Op.68 #4 (1849)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fbCkpb8YCU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwOAU5qfLgQ>

Franz **Liszt**, *Apparitions, Nuages Gris* (1881)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noGdnRR7vMk>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYKl41e_hoU

Eric **Satie**, *Gymnopédie #1*, (1888)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0peXnOnDgQ8>

Claude **Debussy**, *Images Book II* (1907)

"Cloches à travers les feuilles"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2jib_ZxSQnc

"Et la lune descend sur la temple qui fut"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26_2wNQzh6s

"Poissons d'or"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3Sl3yUFahA>

[Symbolism](#), [Exoticism](#), [Orientalism](#)

- **One man's *Drums and Pipes* are another man's "*Gas bombs*"**

ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:

Béla **Bartók**, *Out of Doors* (1925)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deDOEqha8hg>

- **"It looked like you were working on your car engine for 20 minutes."**

George **Crumb** and extended techniques

ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:

A Little Suite for Christmas (1979)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5Zjhzaf02k>

ADVANCE READING ASSIGNMENT:

Agatha Fassett, excerpts from *Bartók: The Naked Face of Genius* (to be uploaded, Dec. 2018)

Class 3: "A metaphysical continuity that defies analysis..."

- **Minimalism**

ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:

Domenico **Scarlatti**, *Sonata in D Minor*, K.141 (1738)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcsRI_LIJHA

Francis **Poulenc**, *Trois Mouvements Perpétuels* (1918)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mu45k8lrS84>

Maurice **Ravel**, « Prélude » from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1918)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaCPY4Plg14>

John **Adams**, *China Gates* (1977)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpY6MI32U4Q>

Martin **Bresnick**, *Ishi's Song* (2016)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOYqnnXTCOM>

- **Surrealism**

ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:

Toru **Takemitsu**, *Uninterrupted Pauses* (1959)

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2y81y0>

- **Serialism**

ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:

Pierre **Boulez**, *Twelve Notations* (1945)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJG38iQ9d7I>

ADVANCE READING ASSIGNMENT:

Alex Ross essay on John Adams in *The New Yorker*

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/01/08/the-harmonist>

Alex Ross essay on Toru Takemitsu in *The New Yorker*

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/02/05/toward-silence>

Alex Ross essay on Pierre Boulez in *The New Yorker*:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/25/the-magus-musical-events-alex-ross>

Optional: Pierre Boulez interview on *Twelve Notations*

<http://www.explorescore.org/pierre-boulez-douze-notations-boulez-video-interview.html>

Class 4: Beyond Bernstein and Copland

- **American Mavericks**

ADVANCE LISTENING ASSIGNMENT:

Charles **Ives**, *Piano Sonata #2, "Concord, Mass."* (1915)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8aSTvtKDGM>

John **Cage**, *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* (1952)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gd-sTOdrks&t=90s>

Mario **Davidovsky**, *Synchronisms #6 for Piano and Electronic Sounds* (1971)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1asXsfEmE0>

Frederic **Rzewski**, *Piano Piece #4* (1976)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCezsZMgW84>

ADVANCE READING ASSIGNMENT:

Alex Ross essay on Charles Ives in *The New Yorker*:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/06/07/pandemonium>

James Pritchett, "Six Views of the *Sonatas and Interludes*"

<http://rosewhitemusic.com/piano/writings/six-views-sonatas-interludes/>

- **Conclusion**

The Instructor

Steinway Artist **John Milbauer** has recently performed in China, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland, and Japan as well as throughout the United States. Highlights of the past two seasons include Ravel's *Concerto in G* with the Boston Pops and Keith Lockhart in Boston's Symphony Hall, an interactive media/music collaboration with MIT's media lab, Poulenc's *Aubade* with San Diego Winds, recitals with Stephanie Houtzeel of the Vienna State Opera, residencies with the Conservatorios Nacionales Superiores of Sevilla and Jaén in Spain, and a tour of major cities in China. Current projects include performances of Milbauer's "Which Side Are You On?" program based on themes of protest, immigration, and workers' rights. A 2017 review in Sevilla said "this extraordinary program makes you discover that music reminds us that we all can be refugees, exiles, and immigrants...and John Milbauer says this through the keys of the piano." France's Republique du Centre has called him "a virtuoso of the first magnitude" while American Record Guide wrote, "Milbauer employs a full expressive range, performs with astounding delicacy, and conveys unspeakable wonder through an intimate touch and astonishing versatility." A laureate of the Orléans Concours in France for piano music of the 20th Century, he has performed concerts devoted only to chance music and enjoys playing music that employs electronic sounds, prepared piano, extended techniques, and graphic notation; in a similar vein, he has contributed a chapter on the performance of the

music of John Cage to *The Pianist's Craft* series. A versatile musician, Milbauer has performed with the Mills Brothers, violinist David Garrett, and Pink Martini.

Milbauer studied music, classics, and government at Harvard College before earning degrees from the Eastman School of Music, The Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, and, as recipient of a Fulbright grant, the Liszt Academy in Budapest. He was awarded the Eastman Performer's Certificate and the Wolodarsky Prize from the Banff Centre, and was nominated for the Gina Bachauer prize for outstanding pianist at Juilliard. In 2018 he was honored to receive the Fred Fox School of Music Maestro Award for sustained student excellence. His teachers include Jerome Lowenthal, Ferenc Rados, György Sebök, Rebecca Penneys, and Joan Moffat. Currently Professor of Piano and Coordinator of the Keyboard Area at the University of Arizona Fred Fox School of Music, Milbauer has been Co-Director of the Chautauqua Piano Program with Nicola Melville since 2012, helping to transform it into one of the premiere summer piano programs in the Americas.