

Music and Contemplative Practice

MU 271

T,R 1-2:15

Professor Steven Nuss, 229 Bixler, srnuss, x3243

Some basic comments (not in any particular order...)

- This is a seminar class in every sense of that word, the sense being — this is not a standard lecture class. Much of how this class unfolds (and it will) depends on you and your particular interests. You need to be an active participant in determining what happens to you this semester. (Those are code words for “class participation.”) The course plan that follows is a rough guide. There will undoubtedly be many diversions, elisions, and additions. The best things that happen for us this semester will surely be unplanned.
- There is no one textbook for this class because no class quite like this has been offered before. We are writing our own book, so to speak. I will draw freely from a wide range of sources. You should too. Be independent. USE THE SOURCES I PROVIDE YOU TO FIND OTHER USEFUL MATERIAL!
- Not everyone in the class has the same experience in music. Indeed, some may have very little. That’s great. We all have unique ways of looking at and hearing things conditioned by our own specialized training. We are going to need as many lateral thinkers and big idea folks as we can get to approach the material of this class. Use your own academic strengths (and emotional strengths) to force you (and your colleagues) to hear and see in new and unexpected ways.
- This is not a class in religious conversion. I’m not trying to get anyone to believe or think a particular way. You are, however, going to be asked to participate in significant ways in certain religious practices. About twenty minutes of each class, for example, will be devoted to various forms of prayer/meditation. Use it as you see fit. We can’t just talk about this stuff. You have to DO it (in some form).
- This is not a class in which I already have the answers and I expect you to learn what I know and then do a test. I don’t have the answers; that’s why we’re doing this class.
- I value one thing during the course of a semester: an original idea and/or concerted effort at arriving at one (or two, or more...). I am not asking for a lot of busy homework. I do, however, expect you to keep up and be engaged in class (see #1). You will complete ONE big paper/project for this class. Each of you is going to be looking for the same thing in many different ways. This topic will be arrived at gradually in consultation with me.
- If at any time I think I need more from you in the class, I’ll let you know.

- Learn from your colleagues. Allow yourself to think out of the box. I want you to feel comfortable enough in this class to make conceptual leaps out loud.
- Some of the music in this class is going to be very new for you. Good. You may hate some of the class music. Good. Your job is to think about it. As much as possible, develop a musical vocabulary to talk about it. This is going to be particularly hard for music people...for reasons that will become obvious.
- You are graded on your everyday effort and command of the material (which we will all know from class discussions) and from your big final paper. If you want to know at any point how you are doing, ask me.

Origins and goals of the class

The opening stages of any university curriculum designed for the study of the history, theory, and practice of Western classical music involve a protracted examination of this music's ties to and origins in the religious beliefs and contemplative practices and organizations (principally Catholic Christian) of Western society in the Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods. Like a rocket gradually losing the stages of its launching device, however, studies of the music of succeeding historical periods progressively distance themselves from any serious consideration of a continuing direct relationship between the creation, performance, and perception of music, and religious beliefs and practices. This increasing distance is traditionally presented as a natural and "correct" result of the scientific and technological advances produced by the birth of mathematically-guided (Newtonian) science in the seventeenth century, advances that fueled the ascendance and academic embrace of the tacit assumptions of rationalist humanism: though there were undoubtedly further problems to work out, the bulk of the universe's properties had or would in time yield to human ingenuity; "common sense" replaced any reliance on supernaturalism, and music and all of man's other pursuits were produced for and in a world that was "knowable," where objects in motion kept a constant mass, where time advanced predictably, and everyone could agree who and where we were in its flow. As the product of an educational system rooted in the assumptions of this conceptual/historical arc, I began my teaching career in full resonance with it. Over the course of the past ten years, however, I have found the validity of this arc to be challenged seriously in two ways.

First, my studies and performances of Japanese traditional (*noh* and *jiuta* shamisen) and other non-Western music, as well as my extensive participation-- in the United States, Japan, and India-- in the contemplative practices of Zen Buddhism (*Rinzai* branch) and Hinduism exposed me to views of music and its

relation to religious belief and practice that revealed as cultural conceits those encountered in my Western musical and academic training. For example, the sacred/secular categories of music that are such a basic part of Western musical thought have almost no meaning in Japan, Bali, and North and South India. In these cultures, music and music theory are not abstracted from religious belief and practice; all music (classical/traditional) is composed, performed, experienced, and thought about as a vehicle of contemplation, as both a manifestation and celebration of the Divine.

Second, recent findings in quantum theory and cosmology indicate clearly that there are serious flaws in the deterministic Newtonian thinking that, over the last three centuries, fueled the gradual and almost complete secularization of Western intellectual and artistic thought and endeavor. Indeed, the work of Albert Einstein, Erwin Schrödinger, Werner Heisenberg, Richard Feynman, and others, has been a devastating (or liberating) bomb blast upon mankind's deepest notions of his world and place in it. While in no way acting as some sort of imprimatur for any specific religious beliefs or dogma, this "new science", with its counter-intuitive, non-linear, multi-dimensional interpretations of physical reality, nevertheless resonates in powerful and paradoxical ways with the conceptual frameworks, goals, and practices of the world's great contemplative traditions. What the new science tells us about time, the existential ambivalence of matter at the quantum level, the origins and evolutionary and devolutional tracks of the perceivable cosmos, suggests that, on many levels, it was actually the religious mystics and contemplatives that had long ago called much of the cosmic/divine "reality game" exactly right.

For all musicians, these ruptures with long-held patterns of cultural and scientific thought and perception invite a *metanoia* of sorts, a reintegration of contemplative practice into music research and performance that frees us from an analytical dependence on accustomed paradigmatic/conceptual boxes, and enables us to experience the world, musical and not, from new and unexpected metaphorical stances.

Class organization

The class will progress through four distinct yet (obviously) interrelated subject areas:

Unit 1: Divine Music, Divine Science

An introductory unit in which a survey of theories of culture and culture formation and interaction and the quasi-mystical writings of some of the leading

scientists of the twentieth century (Albert Einstein's *Ideas and Opinions*, Werner Heisenberg's "Scientific and Religious Truths" in *Across Frontiers*, Erwin Schrödinger's *Science and Humanism*, for example) will verify and outline the problems in the conceptual/historical arc described above. The material covered in this survey will provide the theoretical and conceptual background necessary for our gradual exploration of the relationship between the music, contemplative traditions, and cultural practices of Japan, Medieval and Renaissance Europe, and North and South India, and of the scientific thinking that both led to and now leads away from the conceptual rift constructed between the nature and goals of contemplative practice and those of (Western) intellectual life.

Week 1a) Before jumping right in to the wealth of contemplative primary sources, I thought it would be a good idea for you to talk with someone (besides me) who has encountered and engaged at least one of the contemplative practices we will be studying. I also thought that it would be a good idea if that person were about your age—the whole undergraduate thing, you know? While I don't know anyone here who would be suitable, there are a couple of literary characters who fit the bill perfectly. I want you to make a slow and thoughtful (contemplative) reading of J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*. The experiences of the title characters are (among other things) a great introduction to some of the basics of contemplative practice and its potential for destabilizing the world as you know it, or think you know it. I want you to focus on how they deal with and interpret their contemplative concerns and vehicle, and also think carefully about the people around them—how are they dealing or not dealing with the world as seen/constructed by Franny and Zooey? I'll be curious to see with which set of characters you feel most closely aligned over the course of the semester.

Please come to our next class with the story read and some basic definitions/descriptions of the following:

The Way of the Pilgrim

The Philokalia

Kali Yuga

Upanishads

Yorick's skull

Consecration

Dombey and Son

Hui-neng

Shankaracharya

Gautama

Epictetus

De Caussade

Anna Karenina/Tolstoy

Sri Ramakrishna

Bhagavad Gita

Marcus Aurelius

Matthew, Chapter 6

Chuang-Tzu

Daisetzu Suzuki

satori

1b) Now you have some clues about where to go for instruction in interior prayer. Though you will be reading these things in translation, these are nevertheless the original sources of spiritual instruction for the Orthodox church. Choose one of the essential readings that the pilgrim mentions and write a “how to” summary of their instructions on prayer. Try as closely as possible to write in the same tone of voice. You might summarize in outline form and flesh out each point with prose. You might write entirely in narrative prose. Find the mode of expression that is right for you. After reading your summary, anyone should have some clear idea about how to sit down and begin pursuing the practice of interior prayer. We will work as a committee next time by combining our writings into one class text on interior prayer with which we will begin our training in interior prayer.

We have the complete *Philokalia* on reserve, but the readings are contained in a more easily locatable form in *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*. (We have two copies of this on reserve.) You should also read as much as you can from *The Way of the Pilgrim*, (also on reserve). This is Franny’s book and the pilgrim protagonist has much to teach you about interior prayer.

St. Augustine said, “Those who sing pray twice.” I want you to take this very seriously. What are the implications for all of us if music is prayer. How should we listen to it? How do we write it? Or do we write it? HmMMM? I have also included below some additional sources you should browse and videos and recordings to explore. These sources should lead you other sources and on and on...

Philokalia Readings:

- 1) Nicephorus
- 2) Gregory of Sinai
- 3) Simeon the New Theologian
- 4) St. Ignatius
- 5) Gregory Pallamas, treatise on prayer

Additional readings and material:

Art and spirituality: the Russian icon [videorecording]. [Washington, D.C.] : American Councils for International Education, c1999

Belting, Hans. *The image and its public: form and function of early passion paintings*; translated by Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer, New Rochelle, N.Y.: A.D. Caratzas, c1990

Liturgische Gesänge aus dem alten Russland [sound recording] = Sacred hymns of old Russia] / Ural-Kosakenchor, Austria : Koch-Records, c 1989

One thousand years of Russian church music, 988-1988 / Vladimir Morosan, editor-in-chief, New York : Russian Choral Society, 1990

Lungu, N. *A guide to the music of the Eastern Orthodox Church*. Translated and edited by Nicholas K. Apostola. Brookline, Mass : Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1984

Maguire, Henry. *The icons of their bodies : saints and their images in Byzantium..* Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, c1996

Pärt, Arvo. *Litany* [sound recording]. München : ECM Records, p1996

Strunk, W. Oliver. *Essays on music in the Byzantine world*. New York: W. W. Norton, [1975]

Tavener, John. *The music of silence : a composer's testament*. Edited by Brian Keeble. London ; New York : Faber and Faber, 1999

_____. *Sviatyi* [sound recording]: for SATB choir and solo cello. London : Chester Music ; Bury St. Edmonds, Suffolk : Exclusive distributor, Music Sales, c1997

Wellesz, Egon. *A history of Byzantine music and hymnography*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961

Vorobev, Nikolai Aleksandrovich, *The history and art of the Russian icon from the X to the XX centuries*. Translated by Boris M. Meerovich. Manhasset, N.Y.: Siamese Imports Co., c1986

Week 2) Do the dynamics and realities described and implied in the *Philokalia* have any relation to physical reality as it is currently defined/constructed by the most famous physicists of the last one hundred years? If we are to deal fairly and squarely with contemplative practice we need to see whether or not we can remove the stigma of “irrationality and

impracticality” with which it seems to have become burdened. I have chosen some important and accessible scientific writers and readings for you to peruse. Please read the material contained in the following reserve folders and prepared to offer a ten minute presentation to the class on the salient points and concepts of your favorite scientist. (Clear your choice with me before class):

Einstein, Albert: *Ideas and Opinions*

Feynman, Richard: *Six Easy Pieces*

Greene, Brian: *The Elegant Universe*

Heisenberg, Werner: “Scientific and Religious Truths”

Schrödinger, Erwin: *Science and Humanism*

Week 2b)

Analysis #1:

The score (Webern Op. 6/3) and a recording (CD 22731) of Webern’s Opus 6 are on reserve. Give several listens to this movement and attempt to hear it through the filters of the scientists and prayer authorities you have been reading and discussing. How might you hear this work in a way that reflects the realities they define? Are there ways that work better than others? Do not limit yourself to a single (or even conventional) musical parameter. I will present my own way of hearing this piece as a basis for opening our discussion and of showing you some analytical tools at your disposal.

3a) If music is prayer, how might we think of quantum physics? Are Feynman and Greene and the others prophets in the same ways that Franny’s pilgrim is? What sort of “music” are they talking about? How could you fuse their ideas with the discipline of interior prayer? Attempt to illustrate some of these ideas in a brief prose and graphic analysis of the short Russian Orthodox choral work that I have put on reserve. How might you hear this music as interior *and* as something that reflects the takes on physical reality you have been reading about? You will present you analyses in class.

Unit 2: Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christian Centering Prayers
and their implications for Multi-dimensional Musical Analysis

Our study of the history and practice of both the so-called “psychosomatic” type of contemplative prayer described in the *Philokalia*-- the heart of Orthodox Christian teachings-- is now compared to the Roman Catholic Rosary prayer. This comparison reveals that both involve a seemingly contradictory, multi-dimensional, non-linear, developmental and transformational dynamic both within and generated by the exact/static

repetition of their predetermined formulae. We will focus on the development of music analytical techniques that integrate redefined and extended definitions of various parameters of music for considerations/readings of passages of nineteenth- and twentieth-century works of Western art music *as* (not merely *like*) composite versions of these forms of contemplative prayer. That is, these contemplative music-analytical readings will further develop recent music-theoretical considerations of pitch, pitch space, pitch symmetry and generative functions in ways that demonstrate that each musical work under consideration is, like the prayers themselves, a paradoxically unified nexus of competing and parallel non-linear energies, dimensions, and goals.

Weeks 3-6

1) Come to class having read the “Rosary Folder” on reserve. You are also encouraged to investigate as many of the other sources mentioned in the reading’s footnotes. Be sure that you understand the flow and performance etiquette of this prayer. We will pray/perform it in class. Think about how it differs and is similar to the interior prayer of the pilgrim. How many dimensions are in play here? Who says this prayer and why? How does it complement Catholic Christian theology? How does time *feel* to you in this prayer? Is that the prayer’s intention? Be ready to discuss (a lot!). Father James Martin will join us for our discussion.

2) Analysis #2

Recordings and scores of the opening Claude Vivier’s *Lonely Child* and Gyorgy Ligeti’s *Atmospheres* are on reserve. Do some deep and thoughtful listening to these important pieces. I will present you with some of my own analytical work on these pieces that attempts to grapple the world handed to us by the Rosary. Be ready to assess! Get to know these analyses well. Listen to other works of these composers. Two weeks from now you will come to class with an analysis of a work/excerpt of your choice similar in scope and length to my Vivier and Ligeti analyses. Consult with me about your choices and analytical approaches. You will have fifteen minutes in which to present your analysis and make your prayer/science/musical points. Let me know in advance if you have any special AV needs. You will write reviews of each of your colleagues’ presentations (three to five pages) which will serve as the basis for class discussion.

3) Come to class having read and reflected on the following reserve material. (These are just extended excerpts from articles and books so don’t get excited...)

Jonathan Bernard: "Theory, Analysis, and the Problem of Minimal Music"
Jonathan Bernard: *The Music of Edgard Varèse*
David Lewin: *Musical Form and Transformation*
Robert Morris's *Composition with Pitch-Classes*,

Read these theorists through the lens of the science and prayer material we have dealt with. How do their thoughts analytical techniques square with what Gregory of Sinai taught you about prayer, or what Feynman taught you about how the world goes? I will ask you each for two extended questions/comments about the methodologies these theorists develop/employ. We will use these as the basis for our class discussion.

- 4) Student presentations 1
- 5) Student presentations 2
- 6) Reviews and discussion of student presentations

Unit 3: The Koans of Rinzai Zen Buddhism, and a Reassessment of Music Fundamentals

The Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism is traditionally regarded as a school of "active" contemplation. That is, in addition to "just sitting" (*zazen*), Rinzai Zen also requires the contemplation of *koans*, riddles/questions designed to break through the disciple's reliance on rational and linear (cause and effect) thought and notions of duality. Given the fact that much of the Western musical canon, and music theory and aesthetics are the products of individuals, institutions, and societies operating under misguided conceptions of societal and physical reality, Rinzai Zen's contemplative embrace of the irrational and non-linear will serve as a powerful tool that will assist students in viewing traditional definitions of musical parameters as koans that must be "answered" in ways that extend, reinterpret, and/or re-contextualize them in ways that make breaks with academic and cultural convention, and account for our century's new cultural and scientific realities.

Weeks 7-11

- 1) Come to class having read the opening five chapters of Sekida's *Zen Training*. Compare the physicality of *zazen* with that of the Greek fathers. What role might this kind of body control play in musical performance? What is the nature and purpose of *koans*? Two weeks from now you will come to class with

an analysis of a work/excerpt of your choice similar in scope and length to your previous analyses. Consult with me about your choices and analytical approaches. You will have ten minutes in which to present your analysis and make your prayer/science/musical points. Let me know in advance if you have any special AV needs. You will write reviews of each of your colleagues' presentations (three to five pages) which will serve as the basis for class discussion. Also, make sure you see me this week for a conference on your final presentation/paper.

2) A recording, Japanese score, and Western transcription of *Reibo*, a Zen shakuhachi piece. (Reibo folder) Give them a look and listen. See if you can grasp the logic of the Japanese score. What *could* it mean? The Western transcription should help you a lot...Get a feel for the performance dynamics of the piece and the genre. Do you sense a formal structure? How does all of it square with Sekida? We will discuss all of this in class.

3) Lecture/performance by Carl Dimow. Mr. Dimow has graciously offered to serve as "shakuhachi guinea pig," so come prepared with plenty of questions and thoughts about what you've read and heard so far.

4) Have a good read and think through the following reserve readings:

Ray Brooks: *Blowing Zen*
Christopher Hasty: *Meter as Rhythm*
Jonathan Kramer: *Time of Music*
George Quasha: "Axial Stones"

With your Zen bodies, Zen minds, and Zen music in place, how do you hear these theorists? How Zen are they? How Feynman or Greene are they, for example? How are you going to use what they have to tell you? What role could they play in your current analysis project? How are they dealing with the "time problem"? Remember to follow up on some of their footnotes. Come to class with two extended questions/comments for each of the readings. We will use these for class discussion. This discussion may take awhile...

5) Analysis #3

I will present my own analysis of *Reibo* in which I try to employ the ideas of time and space expressed by Hasty, Kramer, and Quasha (and others we have read). Use my work as the basis for furthering your own work. (It may even be a negative influence!!) How do you feel about the work I present you? Have I

overstepped? Understepped? Not stepped at all? Write a review of this presentation in which you isolate your ideas of its strengths and weaknesses.

- 6) Student presentations
- 7) Student presentations
- 8) Discussion of student reviews

- 9) Zazen session led by Christiane Guillois

Please read the reserve “Zazen Session” folder before class. It will save you and Christiane a lot of time.

Unit 4: *Yantras* and *Mantras* as the Sights and Sounds of Divine Contemplation

A study of Hindu iconographic (*yantras*) and sonic (*mantras*) representations and embodiments of the Divine as discussed in English translations of relevant Hindu holy texts (*Vedas*, *Upanishads*), work of Carl Jung (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*) will provide the foundation for an extension of the conceptual and analytical languages of Units 2 and 3 that explores and elucidates the implications and potential for Western musical analysis of the unique relationship in Hindu contemplative practice between sound and form/space. Of particular importance will be the assessment of descriptions in Hindu sacred literature of the specific types of sounds preferred/required for an effective mantra, the vocal and bodily techniques needed to produce them, and an exploration of the ways in which the contemplative’s physical technique and the sounds it produces can be heard both within and as generators of the typical formal relationships represented in yantras--sound as a generative, spatial force. This free exchange of dimensions between specific types of contemplative sound and elements of formal/spatial structure will thus serve as the music-analytical vehicle for hearing and seeing at progressively more macro levels the correspondences between the character of particular sonic events (dynamic level, articulation, tempo, density) and the creation/articulation of particular types of musical spaces (pitch spaces, pitch-class spaces, contour spaces, etc.), as well as simultaneously exploring the reflexive tensions and relationships between a given work of nineteenth- or twentieth-century Western art music as a sonically realized and perceived phenomenon *and* as an iconographic object of contemplation--the score as yantra.

Weeks 12-13

- 1) Please come to class having read the following reserve folders:

Selected readings from the *Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita*

John Bowker: *World Religions*

Carl Jung: *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*

Heinrich Zimmer: *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*

The complete *Vedas, Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* are on reserve. You should have a look at them as you inch toward your final project. What is the nature of the Indian creation myth and its cosmos? What things are shared/different from the other belief systems we have encountered?

Listen to the following reserve CDs:

Ruth Crawford: Ninth Piano Prelude

Karnataka Sangeeta: *Sarasiruha*

Can you make a case for either or both of these being “Hindu” music? If yes, why? If not, why not? How do both of these pieces “go”? Some Indian authorities on this material will join us for our class discussion.

- 2) Hatha yoga lecture-demonstration by Christiane Guillois

Make sure you have read and understood the “Yoga Folder” on reserve. Preparation will be essential to a productive session.

- 3) Analysis #4

I will present my Om/mantra analysis of Ruth Crawford’s piano prelude #9. As usual, my work is presented as one of many possibilities. See if any of it can assist you in your final projects/papers. Before coming to class it is essential that you read the material in the reserve folder “Straus and Lewin on Inversional Symmetry.” Please prepare question/comments and a short written review of this work for our next class.

- 4) Discussion of student reviews and questions

Week 14 and Exam Week

PRESENTATION OF FINAL PAPERS AND PROJECTS