ANTH 393
Music and Society: Anthropologies of Music

INSTRUCTOR: Andrew Mark, PhD

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

What does it mean to take the time to make music today when it would appear there are so many urgent social and political matters? This class critically engages music history, the lives of performers, the production of live performances, and experiences that involve music makers and organizers, their choices and their communities. Along the way, students will be introduced to foundational theories of ethnomusicology, ecomusicology, and sociomusicology. Performances have always been political and environmental in their manifestation, but the social activities that proceed and allow performance to happen are also transformative. This course traces experiences of popular music today back to fundamental issues of oppression, social, and environmental (in)justice with particular attention to African, African Diasporic, and popular globalized musics. Assignments include attending and critically reporting on local performances as well as conducting ethnographic interviews with artists that students seek out. This class involves blended learning, with face-to-face in class learning for two hours and one hour of online and/or digital work per week. There is significant focus on multi-media recording, listening, and reflection exercises in addition to strategic in-class dialogic sessions with guest artists.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Purpose and Objectives of the Course:

The purpose of this course is to acquaint students with the skills and opportunities needed to engage in critical thought and writing about music and sound as social experiences. Additionally, this course is meant to reveal the political dimensions of what we hear and how we respond.

The specific objectives of the course include augmenting:
1. practical skills to have confidence conducting interviews and conversations with knowledgeable individuals, including skills for sound recording and production.
2. movement towards the critical reflexivity and positionality needed to be aware of the dangers, limitations, and opportunities available to those who seek to represent art and artists in words, particularly within the cross cultural domain of “world music.”
3. the ability to conduct basic musical ethnographic research.
4. the development of critical and analytical listening skills including not only the vocabulary to describe music and sound but the ability to connect such soundings to political and environmental processes and histories.
5. an appreciation for somatic phenomenological approaches to understanding how and why we listen and the ways in which these activities contribute to politicized place making.

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