

**87 Listening to the World: Hearing Difference in Music**

Professor Roshanak Kheshti  
SSB 103, Wednesdays 10-10:50

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 11-1pm &  
by appointment  
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**Description:**

This seminar introduces students to the history of listening to the music of the world in Western culture. We will engage in active listening by critically examining how musical composition, arrangement, recording and production direct us toward familiar and different sounds. No musical training required.

We will also critically engage the Western cosmology of sensation, which recognizes five senses hierarchically organized based on how well each is imagined to classify the world: 1) vision; 2) hearing; 3) touch; 4) smell; 5) taste. Vision is the privileged means of determining sex and race: race is perceived as visible on the skin and sex is perceived as visible on the genitals. Recognizing, however, that race and sex are symbolic systems that adhere to things (food, clothing, places, speech, etc.) we now realize that sex and race are not simply sensed visually but through complex processes that employ all of the senses. How we grow to love a song, hate a noise or perform our place in the world is contingent upon a complex system of sonic signifiers symbolically anchored to absent bodies. "Difference," then, is not only visible, but is audible, yet this sonic aspect of alterity has not thoroughly been explored.

The audible world has been the subject of the field of sound studies, which is an interdisciplinary pursuit that examines sound in a number of different ways: as material production, as consumption, its historical variation, technological transformations, how it constructs and is constructed by space and how it varies culturally. Furthermore, gender, race and sexuality have mainly been theorized around questions of vision, seeing, specularly, film, and photography. In this class we examine how the vast field of gender studies would benefit from a consideration of sound and vice versa, bringing both areas of study into conversation.

**Course Requirements:**

Attendance and Participation constitute 60% of your grade. There is no outside reading. The final 40% of your grade will be based on a presentation that you give regarding a musical event that you attended, participated in or witnessed. This can be a concert, a jam session, a rehearsal, musicians in public, music blasting from a passing car, film sound, etc. Discuss the experience of participating in it, especially at the level of sound. Give a description of the context and how sound either contributed to constructing that space harmoniously or whether it was instead perceived as noise. Also reflect on how this designation—as either harmony or noise—affected your experience of the sound.

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**Meeting 1**

Course Introductions  
Sound Studies

**Meeting 2**

The hierarchy of the senses  
Exercise: watching and listening in two parts; active listening  
Presenters: Fatima

**Meeting 3**

Tonal music (dominant & tonic); Susan McClary's "feminine endings"  
Exercise: hearing the tonic  
Presenters: Shivani, Alex

**Meeting 4**

Attali (noise, sound, music)  
Exercise: hearing noise  
Presenters: Robin

**Meeting 5**

Race, Gender and Sexuality in Music  
Exercise: hearing race, gender and sexuality  
Presenters: Lee

**Meeting 6**

Communities of Sound  
Discussion: "the practice of everyday life" (de Certeau) & reappropriation  
Presenters: Evelyn

**Meeting 7**

Music Industries  
Discussion: where we've been, where we are and where we're going  
Presenters: Angela

**Meeting 8**

Listening to the World  
Exercise: opening your ears  
Presenters: John