

# Understanding Music

A G L O B A L O P P O R T U N I T Y

## MUS 115LEC-B and 115LEC-C

Monday, Wednesday, Friday,  
9:10–10:00 AM / 10:20–11:10 AM  
Live lectures streamed via Zoom



### Remote Instructional Format

No in-person requirements for  
the Spring 2021 semester.

**Prof. Derek Strykowski**, instructor

[Zoom link for virtual office hours](#)

Virtual office hours, M/T/Th 2–4 PM

[drstryko@buffalo.edu](mailto:drstryko@buffalo.edu)

**TA James Falzone**

Virtual office hours by appointment

[jfalzon@buffalo.edu](mailto:jfalzon@buffalo.edu)

**Understanding Music: A Global Opportunity** invites you to explore the many ways in which music contributes to our shared human experience while also developing your skills as an active listener. The course is structured around three guiding questions, the first of which is perhaps the most basic of all: “*what does it sound like?*” We therefore begin with a participatory introduction to the stylistic elements (such as melody and rhythm) from which all music is created. The ability to analyze almost any style of music according to these principles will allow us to articulate how music relates to particular cultural circumstances later in the semester, when the discussion turns to the questions of “*when do we hear it?*” and “*what does it mean?*” We will consider musical examples drawn from a broad range of historical and geographical milieux in order to understand why music remains one of the most sublime and powerful expressions of human culture throughout the world.

You do not need any prior musical training as a performer to approach these topics as a thoughtful listener. **Understanding Music** is a Pathway course within the UB Curriculum, and it can help you to complete topics in “Cultures, Art and Imagination,” “Global Cultures and Expression,” “Communities, Populations, and Spaces,” and “Human Nature.”

## Student Learning Outcomes

Lectures, readings, and class discussions are important methods of instruction that together will prepare you to achieve a number of learning outcomes, which shall be assessed as follows:

## Learning Outcome

Listen to music and discuss its nature using precise disciplinary vocabulary and relevant principles of analysis

Explain how various kinds of music function within the societies that produce them

Understand the multiplicity of meanings that music can evoke, and navigate these meanings to explore the values and experiences of the listeners who hold them

	Music Analysis	Listening Log	Concert Report	Examinations:		
				M1	M2	FL
Listen to music and discuss its nature using precise disciplinary vocabulary and relevant principles of analysis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Explain how various kinds of music function within the societies that produce them		✓	✓		✓	✓
Understand the multiplicity of meanings that music can evoke, and navigate these meanings to explore the values and experiences of the listeners who hold them						✓

## Course Texts

The following musical recordings will be required listening for the Fall 2020 semester:

Dvořák, Antonín. *Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, "From the New World."* 1894. Peabody Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Marin Alsop. October 25, 2015. [\[YouTube\]](#)

Eilish, Billie. *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* Interscope Records, 2019. [\[YouTube\]](#)

All required readings and listening examples, including those listed above, will be made freely available through *UBlearns*. The following are also recommended:

Bernstein, Leonard. *The Unanswered Question*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Blacking, John. *How Musical Is Man?* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973.

Forney, Kristine, et al. *The Enjoyment of Music*. 13th ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 2018.

LaRue, Jan. *Guidelines for Style Analysis*. 2nd ed. Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2011.

## Course Requirements

### Examinations

The two midterm exams and the final exam each follow one of the three guiding questions around which the course is built. The course is cumulative in its conceptual design, but exams only cover topics and examples that have been discussed in the time since the previous exam.

### Short Assignments

You must complete several short assignments: namely, a reading response (Week 1), a music analysis (Week 5), a

listening log (Week 10), and a concert report (associated with the concert requirement, below). Instructions will be posted on *UBlearns* in the appropriate folder.

### Virtual Concert Requirement

Every year, the Department of Music hosts a series of professional concerts that feature distinguished visiting artists and faculty musicians. To meet the requirement, you must attend at least one concert in the series and then write a short concert report about your experience. Please view one of the free concerts that are scheduled to stream live during the semester. See *UBlearns* for more details, including links to suggested concerts.

### Participation + Attendance

You are expected to participate both in group discussions and in general class discussions. Don't hesitate to ask questions. Credit for participation depends on your completion of the short assignments described above, including the concert requirement.

Attendance at lectures and virtual concerts is essential, particularly because the course does not use a textbook. According to the [Undergraduate Catalog](#), students may only be excused from classes due to military obligations, religious observances, illness documented by a physician, conflicts with university-sanctioned activities, public emergencies, and documented personal or family emergencies. The student is responsible for notifying the instructor in writing with as much advance notice as possible. Instructors may determine a reasonable amount of coursework that should be completed in order to makeup the student's absence.

## Grading Policies

Your grade for this course depends on the outcome of the two short Golden Record assignments (together worth 10 percent), the first midterm exam (20 percent), the listening log (10 percent), the second midterm exam (25 percent), the concert report (10 percent), and the final exam (25 percent). Grades are then calculated as follows:

Grade	Points	Percentage
A	4.0	93.00 – 100.00
A-	3.67	90.00 – 92.99
B+	3.33	87.00 – 89.99
B	3.00	83.00 – 86.99
B-	2.67	80.00 – 82.99
C+	2.33	77.00 – 79.99
C	2.00	73.00 – 76.99
C-	1.67	70.00 – 72.99
D+	1.33	67.00 – 69.99
D	1.00	60.00 – 66.99
F	0	59.99 or below

### HOW DO I CALCULATE MY FINAL GRADE?

Reading Response	=	___ of 3
Golden Record Analysis	=	___ of 7
Midterm I ___/30 x 20	=	___ of 20
Listening Log	=	___ of 10
Midterm II ___/30 x 25	=	___ of 25
Concert Report	=	___ of 10
Final Exam ___/30 x 25	=	___ of 25
Your final grade	=	___ of 100

### Incomplete grades for undergraduate students

A grade of incomplete (“I”) indicates that additional course work is required to fulfill the requirements of a given course. Students may only be given an “I” grade if they have a passing average in coursework that has been completed and have well-defined parameters to complete the course requirements that could result in a grade better than the default grade. An “I” grade may not be assigned to a student who did not attend the course.

Prior to the end of the semester, students must initiate the request for an “I” grade and receive the instructor’s approval. Assignment of an “I” grade is at the discretion of the instructor. See [Undergraduate Catalog](#) for details.

## UB Portfolio

If you are completing this course as part of your UB Curriculum requirements, upload a course “artifact” (such as a paper or exam) to your UB Portfolio. For details, visit the [UB Curriculum Capstone](#) website.

## Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a fundamental university value. Through the honest completion of academic work, students sustain the integrity of the university while facilitating the university’s imperative for the transmission of knowledge and culture based upon the generation of new and innovative ideas. When an instance of suspected or alleged academic dishonesty by a student arises, it shall be resolved according to procedures outlined in the academic integrity policy published in the most recent edition of the [Undergraduate Catalog](#).

**“Does my work violate the policy?”** Be sure to ask the professor, in advance of the deadline, if you have any doubt. Ignorance is not an acceptable excuse.

## Accessibility Resources

If you require classroom or testing accommodations due to a disability, please contact Accessibility Resources, located at 25 Capen Hall. AR can be reached by phone at (716) 645-2608 or by email at [stu-accessibility@buffalo.edu](mailto:stu-accessibility@buffalo.edu). Please inform the professor as soon as possible about your needs so that we can coordinate your accommodations.

## Sexual Violence

UB is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of discrimination and sexual harassment. Please contact UB’s [Title IX Coordinator](#) for information about academic and housing accommodations, health and counseling services, help with legal protective orders, and assistance with filing a report if you so choose. For confidential assistance, you may also contact a Crisis Services Campus Advocate at [716-796-4399](tel:716-796-4399).

## Mental Health

You may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. [Counseling Services](#), [Health Services](#), and [Health Promotion](#) are here to help. Learn more about these programs and services by following the links above.

## Course Calendar

This section of Understanding Music meets at 9:10/10:20 AM on the following days:

MONDAY

WEDNESDAY

FRIDAY

### Week 1 | Understanding Music

#### Feb. 1

*Voyager's* Golden Record • Course structure, objectives • **Read** Nelson et al, "Music of the *Voyager*" (*UBlearns*)

#### Feb. 3

Overview of UB Curriculum • Reading response **due**: "Music for the Golden Record" (*UBlearns*)

#### Feb. 5

Three guiding questions about music • Introducing SHMRG: Jan LaRue's five basic elements of musical style

### Week 2 | "What does it sound like?" Sound

#### Feb. 8

Musical style, from Antonín Dvořák to Billie Eilish • Preview of the Golden Record analysis assignment

#### Feb. 10

Volume and dynamic range • Hearing differences in timbre

#### Feb. 12

Three kinds of musical texture: monophony, homophony, and polyphony

### Week 3 | "What does it sound like?" Harmony and Melody

#### Feb. 15

Consonance and dissonance • The major and minor modes

#### Feb. 17

The magic of key • Listening for register and melodic range

#### Feb. 19

Characteristics of musical phrases • Cadences (phrase endings)

### Week 4 | "What does it sound like?" Rhythm and Growth

#### Feb. 22

Measuring rhythms • How to identify the tempo

#### Feb. 24

Recognizing different types of meter • **Read** J. LaRue, "What is Analysis?" on *UBlearns*

#### Feb. 26

Growth as development in time: combining the first four elements • Practice song analysis

### Week 5 | "What does it sound like?" Growth

#### Mar. 1

Growth as an impression of musical form

#### Mar. 3

Forms and large forms: a structural hierarchy • Review session for Midterm Exam I

#### Mar. 5

### MIDTERM EXAM I

Golden Record analysis **due** (*UBlearns*)

**Week 6 | “When do we hear it?” Important Occasions****Mar. 8**

Celebrations of life: “Happy Birthday to You” • The five reporter’s questions

**Mar. 10**

Vitamin C, “Graduation” (2000)  
• **Read** Alan Merriam, Ch. 11 of *The Anthropology of Music* (UBlearns)

**Mar. 12**

Is this music? Christian chant: “Dies Irae” • Qur’anic recitation (Islam): Surah 36, “Ya-Sin”

**Week 7 | “When do we hear it?” Entertainment****Mar. 15**

Let’s dance: Johann Strauss II, “On the Beautiful, Blue Danube” (1867)  
• Taylor Swift, “Shake It Off” (2014)  
• Dance culture of hardcore punk

**Mar. 17**

Music for electronic gaming • Austin Wintory, *Journey* (2012)

**Mar. 19**

Virtuosi: Duke Ellington, “It Don’t Mean a Thing” (1932) • Francisco Tárrega, *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* (1896)

**Week 8 | “When do we hear it?” Music and Drama****Mar. 22**

Musical theater: Lin-Manuel Miranda, “Alexander Hamilton,” *Hamilton* (2015)  
• Opera: Gioachino Rossini, “Una voce poco fa,” *The Barber of Seville* (1816)

**Mar. 24**

Matthew Wilder, “I’ll Make a Man Out of You,” *Mulan* (1998) • Pritam, “Bulleya,” *This Heart is Complicated* (2016)

**Mar. 26**

Soundtracks: John Williams, “Flying Theme,” from *E.T.* (1982) • Diegetic music in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* (2010)

**Week 9 | “When do we hear it?” The Art of Persuasion****Mar. 29**

Advertising showdown: Microsoft, “Introducing Microsoft Surface Studio” (2016) • Apple, “The New MacBook Pro” (2016)

**Mar. 31**

Changing your mind: Joseph Haydn, “Farewell” Symphony No. 45 (1772)  
• Reach a Hand Uganda, “If It’s Not On, It’s Not Safe” (2015)

**Apr. 2**

Protest: Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam” (1964) • Review session for Midterm Exam II

**Week 10****Apr. 5****MIDTERM EXAM II**

Listening log **due** (UBlearns)

**Week 10 | “What does it mean?” Poetry and Music****Apr. 7**

Tupac, “I Cry” and “Dear Mama” (1995)  
 • Jay Chou, “What Kind of Man” (2014)  
 • **Read** R. Gozzi, “Communication as Music Making” on *UBlearns*

**Apr. 9**

Poetry: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Der Erlkönig” (1782) • Song: Franz Schubert, “Der Erlkönig” (1815)  
 • Achim Reichel, “Der Erlkönig” (2002)

**Week 11 | “What does it mean?” Instrumental Music****Apr. 12**

Music with a program: Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) • **Read** Berlioz’ own program note (*UBlearns*)

**Apr. 14**

Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique* (cont.)  
 • Music without a program

**Apr. 16**

Music without mode: Arnold Schoenberg, Piano Suite (1921)  
 • Extra credit analysis **due**

**Week 12 | “What does it mean?” Music and Public Expression****Apr. 19**

Anoushka Shankar, Raag Bhairavi (2014) • Public music: Francis Scott Key, “Star-Spangled Banner” (1814)

**Apr. 21**

“The Star-Spangled Banner,” from Whitney to Fergie • Kneeling protests  
 • **Read** Bennett, “Identity,” on *UBlearns*

**Apr. 23**

Public and private: disputed meanings in Martina McBride, “Independence Day” (1994) • Prince, “1999” (1982)

**Week 13 | “What does it mean?” Taste and Aesthetics****Apr. 26**

Johann Pachelbel, Canon in D Major (c. 1690) • **Read** Hughes, “Why Does Music Feel So Good?” (*UBlearns*)

**Apr. 28**

Aesthetics of American popular taste: Sixty years of the Billboard Hot 100

**Apr. 30**

Mixed signals: Jens Lekman, “Arms Around Me” (2007)

**Week 14 | The Grand Finale****May 3**

Music, engineered: Marconi Union, “Weightless” (2011) • Magenta (2016)

**May 5**

“Why do we make music?” Prehistoric origins • Contemporary explanations

**May 7**

*Voyager* revisited • Review session  
 • Concert report **due** on *UBlearns*

**TBA**  
**Final Examination** on *UBlearns*  
 Any time of day (see FAQ page)