

## **Module 1= Universals**

### **What is Music?**

In order to gain an appreciation for music we must first define what “music” is. Picture a concert hall with a grand piano sitting in the center of the stage. The pianist enters the stage dressed in formal clothes typical of a Western Art musical performance. The audience acknowledges the performer who sits at the piano, opens a sheet of music and then waits for the audience to settle. To begin the piece the pianist starts a silent timer that only he/she can see. The pianist then sits while listening, not playing a note on the piano. This takes place for 4 minutes and 33 seconds until the timer indicates the end of the piece. The pianist then takes a bow (hopefully to applause) and leaves the stage. John Cage wrote his seminal work 4’33” to highlight that all noise could be music. His philosophies were grounded in the concepts and teachings of Zen Buddhism. Is it inappropriate to call the ambient sounds of the space that one is in music? If it is music to someone, then it is music.

Now imagine someone you know who is so sure that the music that they listen to is “real music” that they discount all unfamiliar musical styles, genres, and artists. Growing up in the American South I knew many people who listened to Country music. In the late 1980’s and 1990’s rap music and hip-hop culture had escaped from the boroughs of New York and was appreciated by audiences in a majority of communities across the USA. On more than one occasion I heard a young country music enthusiast rail against rap music. The situation was also reversible. Just as many rap fans would rail against country music. The criticism that they had in common was that, “It all sounds the same.” They might follow that with, “I like music that means something.” Music does mean something to those who like it. Just like 4’33” meant something to John Cage and to millions who have enjoyed it both aurally and philosophically.

There are many ways that humans express themselves through sound. The examples above demonstrate the breadth of musical possibilities within one culture. Now multiply this by the varieties of musical expression found throughout the world’s cultures and throughout history. It is hard to think of all of the possibilities and to believe that one could “appreciate” them all. Do you know why

Gamelan is important to those who make it? Do you know what it feels like to “be in the moment” at a Hindustani musical concert? Do you know the feeling of turning off your conscious thought during an uplifting praise and worship song or at an Electronic Dance Music (EDM) festival? It is important to try to find out why others appreciate music before passing an aesthetic judgment.

The first key is to broaden your concept of what music is. In this course we define **music** as sound organized by humans (Blacking 1973, 4). Because neuroscience is in a time of great discoveries we are learning more and more about music and its biological benefits (reasons). Music is important to humans and has been for at least the last 40,000 years. We know this because the oldest instrument (that has been found) is a bone flute found in Hohle Fels Cave in southwest Germany. The level of sophistication that it took to make the instrument indicates that it took much effort. This is not a primitive instrument.

The ways to listen to music are as varied as the genres. A **genre** is a group of musical pieces that are characterized by similarities. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century humans are surrounded by music and noise. Much of this noise is ambient music. We hear more music than anyone at any other time in history. It is nothing special for many of us. It accompanies our driving, walking, studying, shopping, riding an elevator, etc.... We do not have to pay attention to most of the music that we hear. In fact, much of it is not created for people who are paying attention. Instead it is created for passive listening. **Passive listening** simply means hearing without an intention to experience what one is hearing. Examples of music for passive listening would include ambient music heard in a department store, theme park, or yoga studio. Music played in a commercial and often times in a video game, television show, internet post or movie may also be ambient. Active listening is required to develop an appreciation for a majority of the genres of music. **Active listening** is listening with a purpose. That purpose may simply be to enjoy the sounds, or it may be to analyze the music to find out what makes it unique.

There are as many ways to analyze music as there are varieties of ways to make music. In this class we will utilize five elements of music to gain a greater understanding of the **composition (work of art)**. **The five elements of music are: rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, and form**. Module three will require active listening and analysis of

rhythm. Module four will include melody, harmony, and texture. Module five will cover form. In addition, this course will analyze differences in human musical expression by surveying instruments from around the world (Module 2). This will include a discussion of **timbre**. **Timbre** is a French word that we use to describe the unique quality of the sound of an instrument.

### **The word “music”**

For the purpose of this course we are defining music as sound organized by humans. While this works well in appreciation courses in the Western world it does not always work when talking about the “humanly organized sound” of other cultures. The word “music” is a construct of Western culture and does not translate to all cultures. In the Arabic Islamic world the translation for music is *musiqaa*. While this word refers to much of what westerners would call music it does not refer to melodic recitation of the Qur’an. Recitation of the holiest book in Islam is artful melodic and rhythmic presentation that is done with much passion (soul). Even though this recitation is “sound organized by humans” it is not appropriate to refer to it using the word music. This is because it is a spiritual presentation that Muslims consider to be different (above) secular “music”. This is not to say that all religious recitation is different than music. In Europe the oldest notated music is religious chant called **plainchant** (6<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> centuries). This is often referred to as **Gregorian chant** because of a legend that claims that Pope (Saint) Gregory I was responsible for gathering the musical practice of all of the Roman Catholic lands into a notated set. Saint Gregory certainly did much to canonize the Catholic worship documents but the **plainchant** that has his name most likely evolved in the three hundred years after his death. Plainchant, or Gregorian Chant, is melodic recitation that is called music. Many cultures do not limit music to organized sound. In India, *sangita* refers to both music and dance. For people who tie music into their way of life there is sometimes no word for music because it is not separated from “life”. This is true for many indigenous North Americans and Africans.

## Who makes music?

The concept of who, or what, a musician is also varies between cultures. In the same indigenous North American and African cultures there is not a designation for someone who specializes in music. This is because all members of the community make music. The concept is comparable to the act of speaking in our communities. Everyone takes part in speaking. We recognize that some “speakers” or “preachers” have developed the skill but that does not mean that others do not speak. In our own culture the definition of “musician” is a moving target. What level of proficiency or professionalism does one have to achieve before being considered a musician? Is it not true that one who sings in church or at a birthday party is making music and therefore a musician? For the purposes of a world survey of music it is important to broaden the definition of a **musician** to be anyone who is taking part in music. This can be a virtuoso violinist, a dancer in India, a producer of Hip-Hop or a shower singer.

## Why do people make music?

Humans use music for a variety of reasons that vary from culture to culture. Music signifies different things for different people. Some mainly use it for entertainment and marketing while for others it is a part of **everyday life** akin to speaking or walking. As [Cathy Kilroe-Smith writes in \*Musical Journeys\*](#):

On the continent of Africa, music is used in a number of practical ways. In many cases, it is used while doing everyday tasks so that the mind can rest while the rhythm takes over. Fishermen along the coast of Mauritania use song to help them communally pull in their heavy fishing nets. The songs help them to synchronize their movements so that as the rhythm increases so does the effort put into hauling in their catch. Known for their craftsmanship, the Senofu people of the Ivory Coast use combinations of rhythms to create communal rhythmic patterns. Each action or task has a rhythm, and when combined the effect is of one complex musical tapestry. This ensures that everyone keeps working at a good pace and helps the time pass quicker. Once the workday is over, the music and rhythms change and

evenings are spent dancing and singing. Music is very much part of the fabric of daily life in Africa. Singing and movement accompany many aspects of daily life; even while waiting in line people sing. (Kilroe-Smith 2013, 14)

This passage also illustrates the use of music to increase productivity of **labor**. **Work songs** come from all ways of life. Some examples are sea shanties, field hollers, street cries, lumberjack tunes, prison songs, railroad songs, mining songs, and cowboy tunes. Another kind of work music is traditional military music from times when music was used to organize and motivate troops on a march or on a battlefield. Military music still accompanies important ceremonies and events.

When people **gather together** there is often music. This can be simply to enjoy the company of others like at a picnic or a party. It can also be a gathering that focuses on the music like a concert or a dance. Music is used for celebrations ranging from life's most important events (weddings, graduations, funerals, birthdays) to the most inane (competitive victories, arrival of the weekend). Lullabies are used to put children to sleep and songs help wake people up with tenderness.

The **expression of ideas and emotions** is a reason for much of the Western World's popular music. Listeners relate to the messages in pop tunes. Songs and works about emotions that are generated by love are a common example of emotional expression in music. In this way, music is often used to identify and express who we are as musicians and listeners. This expression can be personal or it can be used for group identity. National Anthems are used to unify members of a society under a common musical theme. In international gatherings like the Olympics music provides national unity and pride. Protest songs can unify many people behind a common goal. These songs often give people strength and courage to carry on.

**Music is a profession** for many. There is much money to be made by performing and composing music. Think of all of the commercial uses of music. Music is heard in stores, in parks, on television, in the movies, in airports, and in restaurants. Often times people compose, perform, and record this music primarily for money. Professional Western classical musicians play concerts year round. Many of these concerts do not contain music that every member is passionate about.

One of the most striking and profound uses of music is in worship. A majority of humans use music in **religious practices**. This is evident in hymns and choral singing of Christianity. It can be found in the Sufi Whirling Dervishes and in the devotional aspect of Hindustani and Carnatic music from India. In the shamanistic cultures of the world communication with the spirit world is facilitated through musical practice with shaman often singing and drumming. Religious trance accompanied by music can be found across the globe, from Tibetan Buddhism to Alabaman Pentecostal Christianity.

The spiritual or religious aspect of music is a reason that many musicians give for wanting to devote their life to the art. Because science cannot yet explain the transcendent power of music we say that music has **metaphysical** power. Metaphysics is a term that is used to explain concepts or ideas that cannot be scientifically proven (yet). This can be felt in the solitude of a prayerful chant or in the common “vibe” of thousands dancing at an electronic dance music festival or club.

Dance is a form of human expression that is almost inseparable from music. Because of this much music is created to accompany, or facilitate dance. This dance can be formal, like in a European ballet or Egyptian *zaar*. Dance music can also be informal, like at a concert or club.

## **What is aesthetic preference?**

In a limited sense aesthetics are the judgments and preferences that humans place on art and cultural works. Aesthetic judgments are not made from only one area of our understanding. They are philosophical, scientific, and theoretical. In simpler terms aesthetic judgments are emotional, intellectual and sensory all at once. It is important to recognize differing aesthetics as the result of the culture from which they arise. Many American students have an aesthetic preference for music that has extra-musical meaning heard in words that are sung. In this case **extra-musical** refers to aspects of the music that are in addition to arranged sounds. In Western music history **musicologists** (people who study music as an academic subject, mostly used for describing scholars of European Art music) divide works into two categories that indicate the meaning of a piece. The category in which the works contains extra-musical meaning is called **programmatic music**. Programmatic music can tell a story or simply

relate an idea with or without words. As a side note: Music with words can generally be called songs while music without words is usually referred to as a piece or work. The other category is **absolute music**. Absolute music refers to music that contains no extra-musical story or idea. There is not currently a strong aesthetic for absolute music. The Classical Style Period (1750-1820) is a time in European Art Music when there was emphasis on absolute music. This is when the sonata, string quartet, concerto, and symphony became important genres.

Music that has words can relate any idea, story, or emotion that the songwriter and/or musicians want to convey. Some songs are narrative. This means that they tell a story. Some simply relate an emotion or idea. Sometimes the words that are sung do not have literal meaning to the listeners/performers. Instead, performance of the piece holds the actual meaning. This is the case with many patriotic songs or protest songs. In some music, the syllables being sung are meaningless. Meaningless sung syllables are called **vocables**. Many indigenous American songs utilize vocables. They are also a part of England's rich madrigal and carol tradition ("Fa-la-la-la-la") and American Do Wop music from the late 1950's.

Some listeners prefer music without direct meaning. A prime aesthetic of the absolute music of the Classical style period was emphasis on form and proportion in music. The works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart epitomize this aesthetic goal. Understanding much of Mozart's music necessitates understanding the forms and melodies of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Austria. More recently ambient music has found an audience. Pure dance music (without lyrics) might also be absolute. Absolute music is only "about" the arrangement of sounds.

Aesthetic preference can also manifest in the way that a performer interprets a piece of music. In much of the world's cultures there is a strong aesthetic for hearing traditional, recognizable pieces. Each new performer of these traditional pieces is expected to add their own musical identity to the piece. This is an opposing aesthetic to cultures in which each subsequent performance of the piece tries to approximate the original sound, aesthetic, and intent of the piece. Students in America often reveal aesthetic preference by considering how they would like to hear an artist play a song that they like. Would they rather the artist interpret in a new way or do they want to hear it "like it was on the album"?

## **Transmission of Music and Knowledge**

The process by which music moves from between one person to another, between generations, and between communities is called musical transmission. Since Edison's first recording in 1877, recording technology has transformed music performance and transmission. The process of change from recording sound on tin foil, wax cylinders, vinyl, magnetic tape, to the digital revolution that brought about compact discs and now streaming has drastically changed how music is transmitted. In the current world (2016) it is possible to hold more music on a device small enough to keep in one's pocket than a major library could physically contain in 1976. This has changed how much humans consume and value music. When combined with video recording and the Internet, recording has become the primary way to transmit music between people, cultures, and generations. The technical revolution has facilitated cross cultural exposure and exploration that is unparalleled in human history. This has ramifications that are yet to be discovered and/or understood.

Before modern recording technology the only ways to pass down a work in an original state were to notate it on paper or to pass it down orally. Many cultures continue traditions that have been ongoing for centuries of passing down music orally/aurally. While new performers are part of a continuing lineage and tradition it is likely that the music that they inherit continually evolves. The oldest extant written notation that gives complete instructions on how the music is to sound originated with Medieval European monks. This is now the staff notation that is fast becoming a global standard for music notation.

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