

MUS 425 Film Music

Wintermester 2019

Number of Credits

3

Instructor

Louis Niebur

Louis Niebur is Associate Professor in Department of Music. He researches and writes on electronic music in popular culture and media, and is the author of *Special Sound: The Creation and Legacy of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop*, a history of the BBC's electronic music studio from the 1950s to the 1990s.

Catalog Description

Interdisciplinary study of film music, focusing on the various functions of different kinds of music used on soundtracks. (General Capstone course.)

Prereq(s): ENG 102; CH 201; junior or senior standing.

Required Textbooks/Materials

The following texts are required material in this course:

No textbook is required for this course. Readings will be made available in WebCampus.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to

- demonstrate familiarity with the current state of research in media studies;
- analyze a film's score, understanding its basic components and techniques; and
- contextualize a film's score regarding composer, period, and style.

First Week of Materials/Assignments

The following schedule is subject to change:

January 2: Introduction to Film Music; terms, basic techniques, suturing, source music, "original" versus "pre-composed," etc.
Source Music, non-original music

"Silent" film techniques, to 1927
Earliest Sound Films
Readings: Claudia Gorbman, "Narratological Perspectives on Film Music";
Kathryn Kalinak, "A Theory of Film Music"
Excerpts: *Rope*, *Wings*, *The Jazz Singer*, *The Flying Scotsman*
Screening: *Hannah and Her Sisters*

January 3: Early Sound Films to 1933
Early Dramatic Sound Films, 1930–1939, Wagner
In-Depth Discussion: Pre-Composed in *Hannah and Her Sisters*
Reading: Kathryn Kalinak, "Every Character should have a Theme"
Excerpts: *Grand Hotel*, *Vitaphone Shorts*, *The Broadway Melody*, *42nd Street*, *The 39 Steps*, *Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Most Dangerous Game*, *King Kong*, and *Wuthering Heights*
Screening: *Rebecca*

January 4: Discussion of *Rebecca*
Large-Scale Studio Productions: Max Steiner, Herbert Stothart, 1935–1945,
Introduction to Film Noir
Readings: "Max Steiner"; Justin London, "Leitmotifs and Musical Reference in the Classical Film Score"; Kalinak, "'Not exactly classical, but sweet', Laura: New Directions"
Excerpts: *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Laura*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Maltese Falcon*, and *Double Indemnity*
Screening: *Now, Voyager*

Course Details

This course is an historical-thematic overview of major topics in the area of film music, particularly the way music is used to produce meanings in conjunction with the visual image. The course is organized both semi-chronologically and by film genre, but is limited with a few exceptions to English-language cinema. The subject matter ranges from early "silent" and sound films in the dramatic, musical, and adventure genres, through mid-century genres, such as the romantic drama, film noir, suspense-thriller, and historical epic, to pop song scoring, psychological/suspense thrillers, "neo-classical" films (including the science fiction and adventure genres), and contemporary electronic/synthesizer scores (1961–2016). The ability to read music is not required for this class.

Grade Breakdown

The point distribution for the course is:

| Assignment | Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Daily one-page papers | 20 |
| Participation | 30 |

| Assignment | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Midterms (two worth 15% each) | 30 |
| Final Paper | 20 |
| <i>Total</i> | |

The percentage distribution for the course is:

| Letter | Percentage |
|---------------|-------------------|
| A | 92–100 |
| A- | 90–91 |
| B+ | 88–89 |
| B | 82–87 |
| B- | 80–81 |
| C+ | 78–79 |
| C | 72–77 |
| C- | 70–71 |
| D+ | 68–69 |
| D | 62–68 |
| D- | 60–61 |
| F | below 60 |