**Cultural Sociology of Music: Live Performance and/as Ritual**

Fall 2025

Every other Friday, 10:00-13.30 Room P52

Instructors:

Abigail Gower, Ph.D. (Office hours by appointment)

Prof. Bernadette Nadya Jaworsky, Ph.D. (room 3.66, Wednesdays 11:00 – 12:00; jaworsky@fss.muni.cz)

**Course Outline:**

Within the broad field of cultural sociology, the cultural sociology of music is a relatively small but up and coming sub-discipline with huge potential for a multi-directional understanding of the role of music as a source of meaning making within different cultures. This course focuses on one of many potential research directions: music - specifically live performance - and/as ritual. In exploring key texts and theories from Durkheim, Collins, and Alexander on ritual and cultural performance as well as more music-specific texts whose content can be related back to those theories, this class explores how live music performances can be the basis for deep and enduring social/cultural meaning making, uniquely aiding in strengthening the bonds of society itself. However, this class is not only theoretical. Discerning the impact of live music is something best understood through a combination of discussing and **doing**. Thus, this class is analytical, experimental, and experiential. In addition to the reading and discussion half of the course, the class will also be making their own musical cultural performance, structuring their own ritual. The class will form a choir, and be expected to prepare two pieces which will be selected by the group during the organizational meeting (this requires no previous musical experience, only a willingness to sing). Drawing from their knowledge learned via the required readings and discussion, the class will construct a performance to be given live at the end of the semester as a final exam. Additionally, written journaling assignments will be given to be answered at the end of every class responding to specifically formulated questionnaires, transforming the participatory part into both a live cultural sociologically informed experience for the students and an experiment in itself.

**Course Objectives:**

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

* Define and discuss different cultural sociological concepts of ritual/cultural performance
* Understand and apply these concepts within the context of live music performances
* Relate music-specific body, space, and audience factors to their understanding of meaningful ritual creation
* Analyze their experience as an audience member of a live musical performance from a cultural sociological perspective
* Apply the knowledge gained throughout to course to curate their own unique music cultural performance

**Conditions for passing the course:**

Reading and discussion participation: 25%

* 5 points for each class (students who cannot attend the class due to illness,

technical problems or other serious personal reasons should contact the

instructors for individual extra work);

Preparation for and participation in choir rehearsals: 25%

* 5 points for each class, preparation includes independent practice as well as group practice in between each class, see below for specifics.

Journaling after the rehearsals: 20%

* 4 points for each class, see below for journaling expectations

Attend a performance and journal about it (mid-term): 10%

* 10 points (5% performance attendance, 5% post-performance journaling)

Active and informed participation in final performance + invitation - Bring at least one attendee (final): 20%

* 20 points (10% attendance and active informed participation, 5% Bringing an audience member, 5% post-performance journaling)

**Points system:**

Reading and discussion:

4-5 points

Regularly contributes good, thoughtful questions and ideas, listens respectfully – does not interrupt or sidetrack, works on task within groups – a leader by example and a model for others, student is almost always prepared for class with assignments read

2-3 points

Contributes occasionally to class discussion and works well during group work, listens respectfully – does not interrupt or sidetrack, usually prepared with assignments read/class materials at hand, could contribute more

1 point

Rarely contributes to discussions and group work or detracts with interruptions, side comments, and is often not focused, student is almost never prepared for class

Choir rehearsal:

4-5 points

Very well prepared. You have clearly put concerted effort and time into consistently learning and practicing your vocal parts (20 minutes every day). You have attended and actively participated in your small group independent rehearsals, you are singing together and working well with both your small group as well as the large class group. You actively participate with your classmates in developing and curating the class performance based on your reflective reading of the course materials. In doing this, you show that you have a comprehensive understanding and curiosity about how to connect the theories being learned to a real world performance.

2-3 points

Prepared. You have made an effort to learn and practice your vocal parts (10-15 minutes every day). You have attended your small group independent rehearsals and are trying to work together with your fellow choir members as well as the large class group. You participate in suggesting how the reading materials can be applied to the class's performance. In doing this, you show that you understand how to connect the theories being learned to a real world performance.

1 point

Not prepared. You have not consistently practiced or put enough effort into learning your vocal parts. You have not attended the small group independent rehearsal, and are thus under or unprepared for the large class rehearsal.You have perhaps done the readings, but hardly participate in applying them to the class performance, or demonstrate little understanding as to how they could be applied in a real world performance.

Journaling:

3-4 points

The journal entry is at least 2 (clearly) hand written pages long, is on time (by 13:00 the following day after class), and directly responds to the questions asked and shows an understanding of the in class reading as well as a personal response to the experiential questions regarding the choir rehearsals (I want to hear your thoughts, musings, and reactions!)

2 points

It is less than two full written pages, but is on time or almost on time. The responses seem to only show a roundabout understanding of the class reading. The questions regarding the choir rehearsals are lacking detail and seem vague and impersonalized

1 point

The assignment was not done, is handed in very late, or is written so unclearly that I am completely unable to read it. The responses are short and show little effort generally.

**Midterm:**

10 points

You are expected to attend a live performance and reflect on the experience as an audience member from a cultural sociological perspective. The genre does not matter. A minimum 4 page handwritten journal entry is expected by noon the following day.

**Final:**

10 points

Active and engaged performance participation including being available on the day before the performance for preparations.

5 points

Post performance journaling of minimum 5 handwritten pages due by 13:00 on December 13th

5 points

Bringing an audience member is a required part of the final

**Students will be evaluated on this scale:**

A = 90-100 points

B = 80-89 points

C = 70-79 points

D = 66-69 points

E = 60-65 points

F = 0-59 points

**Study materials and instructions:**

The readings for each class are specified in the syllabus. All readings are required. The texts are available in electronic form in the IS Study Materials folder and are linked to the Interactive Syllabus.

Materials for class and independent choir practice will also be in the study materials folder.

Instructions for the assignments are available in the Study Materials.

Please, check the Interactive Syllabus regularly for actual readings and study instructions.

**Academic Honesty:**

The Faculty of Social Studies at MU expects students to know the study rules and maintain

academic honesty by refraining from plagiarism and from cheating during exams. Plagiarism

means that one presents other peoples’ ideas as one’s own and does not credit the author.

Plagiarism is one of the most serious breaches of ethical standards in the academic

environment, for it denies the mission of the university and the meaning of studying. From a

legal perspective, plagiarism is the stealing of intellectual property. In addition, the use of AI

tools should be judicious and under the direction of the teacher. The official FSS policy on

academic honesty and on the use of AI technology are available in the course’s interactive

syllabus in IS. Academic dishonesty is not tolerated under any circumstances at FSS. **The**

**minimum penalty for academic dishonesty is expulsion from the course, a grade of F for**

**the semester, and referral to the Faculty disciplinary committee.**

All assignments submitted in this course must be your own work. Any use of generative AI in working on assignments is prohibited. The assignments assigned in this course are designed to motivate you to develop creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The use of AI technology will limit your ability to develop these skills and achieve the learning objectives of this course.

**Course Schedule:**

1. **Organizational meeting**

(September 19th)

* Course structure explanation, discussion of personal and group expectations
* Short introduction to Cultural Sociology of Music and Ritual/Cultural Performance
* Discussion about students previous interactions with music
* Selection of performance pieces

**First choir rehearsal:**

Gaining comfort as a group, separating into vocal parts, begin first piece

Journal answers to questionnaire

1. **(Live) Music and/as Ritual**

(October 3rd)

**Required reading prior to class**

McCormick, Lisa (2012) “Music Sociology in a New Key”. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 722-742.

Durkheim, Émile (1915): *The Elementary Form of Religious Life*. London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, pp. 205-230.

Collins, Randall (2004): *Interaction Ritual Chains.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 32-46.

**Second choir rehearsal**

Rehearse individual vocal parts on first piece

Combine vocal parts in harmony

Journaling Questionnaire

1. **Alexander, Cultural Performance, and Live Music (as well as Collins Continued)**

(October 17th)

**Required reading prior to class**

Alexander, Jeffrey (2011): *Performance and Power.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 25-48.

Alexander, Jeffrey (2011): *Performance and Power.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 53-82.

Collins, Randall (2004): *Interaction Ritual Chains.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 47-64.

**Third choir rehearsal**

Rehearse individual vocal parts on second piece

Combine vocal parts for second piece

Rehearse first piece in full

Journaling Questionnaire

**October 31st is Reading Week, there is no class on this day.**

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1. **Live Music and the Body/Mind**

(November 14th)

**Required Reading prior to class**

Freeman, Walter J. (1998): “A Neurobiological Role of Music in Social Bonding”. In: *The Origins of Music*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 411-424.

De Nora, Tia (2004): “Music and the Body”. In: *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 75-88.

Becker, Judith (2011) “Rhythmic Entrainment and Evolution”. In: *Music, Science, and the*

*Rhythmic Brain: Cultural and Clinical Implications.* New York: Routledge, pp. 49-72.

**Fourth choir rehearsal**

Rehearse first and second piece in full

Beginning cleaning up sections which still need work

Journaling Questionnaire

1. **Live Music and Space - And How to Make Our Own**

(November 28th)

**Required reading prior to class**

Rodger, Dianne (2016) “Creating the right ‘vibe’: Exploring the utilisation of space at Hip Hop concerts in Adelaide and Melbourne” In: *Emotions, Senses, Spaces: Ethnographic Engagements and Intersections*. Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, pp. 31-48.

Whiting, Sam (2022): “The Live Gig”. In: *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music, Space, and Place*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., pp. 241-257.

Picaud, Myrtille (2023): “Framing Performance and Fusion: How Music Venues’ Materiality and Intermediaries Shape Music Scenes”. In: *The Cultural Sociology of Art and Music*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 251-288.

**Fifth choir rehearsal**

Rehearse first and second piece in full

Continue cleaning up any sections still challenging

Performance planning informed by reading and discussion

Journaling Questionnaire

1. **Live Music and Audiences**

(December 12th)

**Required reading prior to class**

Toelle, J., & Sloboda, J. A. (2019). The audience as artist? The audience’s experience of participatory music. *Musicae Scientiae*, 25(1), 67-91.

Radbourne, Jennifer, et al. (2014): “The Value of ‘Being There’: How the Live Experience Measures Quality for the Audience”. In: *Coughing & Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience.* Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, pp. 55-69.

Johnson, Bruce (2017): “In the Body of the Audience”. In: *Musicians and Their Audiences: Performance, Speech and Mediation*. New York: Routledge, pp. 15-34.

**Sixth choir rehearsal**

Full performance rehearsal (pieces should be fully prepared and performance ready)

Review any sections required

Continued performance planning informed by readings and discussions

Journaling Questionnaire

1. **Final Exam (Performance)**

(\*December 12th, in the evening)

**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS:**

* All journal entries are expected to be submitted by 13:00 the following day after class
* Students are expected to be practicing their vocal parts independently daily for 20 minutes
* The class will be split into smaller groups based on voice types (SATB), these groups are expected to meet and practice their parts together for 45 minutes once every week.