

NMD 250
Electronic Music Composition I: Item & Arrangement

Instructor: Nate Aldrich
nbaldrich@earthlink.net

office hours: Monday, 3:30 – 4:30 pm @ the electronic music studio

Course materials are available for download at:
www.nbaldrich.com/nmd250.html

This course runs in tandem with NMD 251. Though not co-requisites, students wishing to take NMD 251 without first taking NMD 250 need the approval of the instructor.

This course is designed to provide students with an opportunity to explore the ideas and techniques of audio composition with recorded media. 'Item & Arrangement' refers to the style of composition that creatively places recorded sounds in a fixed timeline. Starting with Musique Concrete in the late 1940s, this technique continues today as a foundation for many contemporary and popular forms, from acoustic ecology to hip-hop. Using *Electric Sound* by Joel Chadabe as the primary text, along with topical hand-outs, students can expect an introduction to working with sound in the digital environment, including fundamentals in field recording technique, waveform editing, filtering and digital processing. This will all take place in the context of a composing forum where students will be expected to regularly produce and discuss work in relation to the theoretical history of Electronic Music as an art form.

How the grade is constructed:

1. There will be four (4) quizzes over the course of the semester, as indicated on the syllabus. The content of each quiz will be culled from the listenings, lectures, discussion *and readings* assigned to date. Each quiz is worth a possible ten (10) points, with a total of forty (40) points possible. *There will be no final exam.*
2. Each student is required to present three (3) pieces in class. A presentation consists of a) playing an original work created during the course of the semester and b) being prepared to discuss with the class the compositional goals and processes of that work. Deadlines for the pieces are indicated in the syllabus. Pieces may be presented to the class before the due date, but not after. Each piece presented is worth a possible fifteen (15) points, with a total of forty-five (45) points possible.
3. Each student is requested to actively participate in the classroom discussions that should serve as the adrenaline of the course. This participation, along with the various other assignments indicated on the syllabus, will contribute the final fifteen (15) points to your grade.

The instructor will be the final and sole arbiter in assigning these points.

4. The final grade will be constructed by adding the numbers together, then assigning the grade indicated by the total. Simple!
5. ***Deductions in grade points will be assigned for absences!*** Every student is given one (1) unexcused absence during the course of the semester. All other unexcused absences will result in a five (5) point deduction (example: If you miss 3 classes, you will have a total of 10 points deducted from the grade score as it is constructed by the points system above, thus an 87 (B+) would become a 77 (C+)).

Please note: Any missed quizzes or assignments may or may not be made up, through late submission or alternate assignments, solely at the discretion of the instructor. Work not submitted will receive 0 points.

About the class structure:

We will be engaged in three parallel pursuits simultaneously in this class: 1) We will trace the history of Electronic Music; 2) we will explore several foundational compositional strategies and significant artists who employ them, as well as the schools of thought that motivate these artists; 3) we will avail ourselves to some of the basic techniques and technologies employed by electronic music composers, particularly Pro Tools and working with digital waveforms in a timeline. This will all then be manifest in your compositional thought and work.

About creating pieces for the class:

The work you create for presentation to the class is up to you, within the guiding requirements for each piece indicated on the syllabus. Compositions need not reflect any particular idea, technique or technology presented in class, but should reflect your thinking as an Electronic Music composer in the context of the assignment specifics. Each piece ***must be presented as a Pro Tools session in the Electronic Music Studio*** unless the instructor has specifically agreed in advance to another format. Any alternate presentation must be accompanied by the Pro Tools session from which it was made, available for class viewing in the Electronic Music Studio.

About the Electronic Music Studio:

The Electronic Music Studio hours are:

Monday – Friday: 9 am – 9 pm

Saturday & Sunday: 9 am – 6 pm

If a class is in session, students will need to use the back stairs. A key will be necessary and may be obtained at the CML in the Fogler Library.

In the event of an extended disruption of normal classroom activities, the format for this course may be modified to enable its completion within its programmed time frame. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to the syllabus that will supersede this version.

NMD 250 - Syllabus

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8/29 Introduction – how this course will work; what's expected; readings in *Electric Sound*; additional readings; using the Electronic Music Studio; what is Electronic Music (or, perhaps, what is it not)?

9/12 Phenomenological Listening – a Cagean approach to understanding what you hear; a little bit of psychoacoustics. Also, a quick introduction to the Pro Tools environment so you can get to work!

please read: Phenomenological Listening

assignment: create a folder for yourself on the studio computer in the "student works" folder

9/19 Working with Sound Objects & the Timeline – the Pro Tools environment, the studio environment and the idea of recorded sound as an object. An introduction to editing, mixing, multi-tracking & bouncing;

please read: The Early Instruments

assignment: write an aural observation

9/26 Student Compositions #1 pt. 1 – 1st compositions due! - This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing our first compositions.

please read: The Great Opening Up of Music to All Sounds

assignment: make a piece of musique concrete using found recordings

10/3 Student Compositions #1 pt. 2 - This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing more of our first compositions; **1st quiz!**

10/10 Fall Break

10/17 Recording Workshop - a brief introduction to digital audio recording gear and techniques; a brief intro to Acoustic Ecology.

please read: Expansion of the Tape Music Idea

10/24 Modifying the Sound Object: the spectral domain -

filtering as a compositional tool; **2nd quiz!**

assignment: make a field recording or recordings that you will use in your 2nd composition.

10/31 Modifying the Sound Object: the time domain - looping, phasing and delays as compositional tools.

please read: Out of the Studios

11/7 Student Compositions #2 pt. 1 - 2nd compositions due!

This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing our second compositions.

assignment: make a piece of musique concrete using recordings you have made

11/14 Student Compositions #2 pt. 2 - This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing more of our second compositions; **3rd quiz!**

please read: Computer Music

11/21 NO CLASS

11/28 Student Compositions #3 pt. 1 - 3rd and final

compositions due! - This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing our final compositions.

assignment: make a composition that uses morphology as its primary compositional foundation

12/5 Student Compositions #3 pt. 2 - This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing more of our final compositions; **4th and final quiz!**

please read: Where Are We Going?