

## NMD 250

### Electronic Music Composition I: Item & Arrangement

Instructor: Nate Aldrich  
*nathaniel.aldrich@maine.edu*

office hours: TBA

**Course materials are available for download at:  
[www.nbaldrich.com/nmd250.html](http://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 and Dub Step.

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 expected 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. It is the student's obligation to inquire in a reasonable timeframe about this possibility. 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 Digital Audio Workstation software 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 stereo .aiff or .wav file and available as a Reaper, Logic, or other approved DAW session on your external USB drive** or the Electronic Music studio outboard drive, unless the instructor has specifically agreed in advance to some other format.

### **On electronic devices in the classroom:**

Due to an escalating potential for classroom disruption, the following is the current policy for this course:

"Be here now."  
- Ram Dass

Please shut your phone off prior to class time. If your phone rings or if you are found using it, it will be confiscated for the duration of the class period. If this occurs more than once over the course of the semester, you will be marked as absent for that day.

If you are found to be using your laptop for *anything other than class notes*, and that includes doing your work for class during class or googling something we may be discussing, you will be asked to shut your computer off. If this occurs more than once over the course of the semester, you will be marked as absent that day.

If this somehow creates a hardship, please come speak to me.

### **Classroom Expectations:**

Students and instructors each play an important role in maintaining a classroom environment optimal for learning, and are expected to treat each other with respect. Class discussions require diverse opinions to be shared; please be thoughtful in sharing your perspectives and responses with one another.

Disruptive behavior is defined as any type of activity that would interrupt, in a negative manner, the normal flow of information exchange in the classroom or on the UMaine campus. Such conduct can not be tolerated as it interferes with the financial and educational investments of other students. Students that exhibit such unacceptable behavior will be asked to leave the classroom setting, and their future presence in the class will come under the review of an officer of the University.

Examples of inappropriate behavior include but are not limited to the following:

- verbal or physical abuse of another person
- sexual harassment or discrimination
- threats
- malicious destruction, damage or misuse of college property
- indecent or disorderly conduct.

Other behaviors that can be disruptive include chatting during class, preparing to leave before class is over, and/or consistently arriving late to class. The instructor will be the arbiter of what constitutes disruptive behavior. This behavior can affect your grade!

### **Use of IMRC Studios, Labs and Other Facilities:**

You are encouraged to use the IMRC facilities to complete your work this semester. Access to the departmental facilities is a privilege. If there are problems - doors left unlocked, tools missing or damaged, trash everywhere, unsafe use of tools and materials, or allowing access to unapproved users - your access may be suspended.

### **About the Electronic Music Studio:**

The Electronic Music Studio is a shared facility. There is technical support scheduled for the A/V suites at various times during the week; these times are posted on the IMRC108 door. If you encounter a problem, please seek assistance. If you are working and no support is available, please do not attempt to address the problem.

Problems can and should be reported to:

imrcbooking@gmail.com

You may reserve a room in advance here:

<http://imrccenter.com/facilities/imrc-facilities-reservations/>

The Electronic Music Studio hours are:

posted on the IMRC A/V production studio suite (rm 108) door.

### **In the Event of an Extended Disruption**

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.

### **Academic Honesty**

Standards of academic integrity are expected of all students. These require that students never present the work of others as their own. Nor should the same work be turned in for more than one class. Violations will result in failing the class and other disciplinary actions. Academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism and all forms of misrepresentation in academic work, and is unacceptable at The University of Maine. As stated in the University of Maine's online undergraduate "Student Handbook," plagiarism (the submission of another's work without appropriate attribution) and

cheating are violations of The University of Maine Student Conduct Code.

### **Students with a Disabling Condition**

Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require special accommodations in order to meet course requirements should notify the instructor as soon as possible with appropriate documentation and meet with the instructor to clarify and arrange what is needed. If you have a disability for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Disabilities Services, 121 East Annex, 581-2319, as early as possible in the term.

### **Religious Holy Days**

If you expect to miss a class due to the observance of a religious holy day, you must inform the instructor, in writing, by the sixteenth day of the semester in order to make accommodations for exams or assignments.

### **Sexual Discrimination Reporting**

The University of Maine is committed to making campus a safe place for students. Because of this commitment, if you tell a teacher about an experience of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, relationship abuse (dating violence and domestic violence), sexual misconduct or any form of gender discrimination involving members of the campus, your teacher is required to report this information to the campus Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention or the Office of Equal Opportunity.

If you want to talk in confidence to someone about an experience of sexual discrimination, please contact these resources:

For confidential resources on campus: Counseling Center: 207-581-1392 or Cutler Health Center: at 207-581-4000

For confidential resources off campus: Rape Response Services: 1-800-310-0000 or Spruce Run: 1-800-863-9909.

Other resources: The resources listed below can offer support but may have to report the incident to others who can help:

For support services on campus: Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention: 207-581-1406

Office of Community Standards: 207-581-1409 University of Maine Police: 207-581-4040 or 911 Or see the *OSAVP website for a complete list of services at*

<http://www.umaine.edu/osavp/>

## NMD 250

### Electronic Music Composition I: Item & Arrangement

#### 9/5 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.

*please read:* Phenomenological Listening (.pdf download)

#### 9/19 Working with Sound Objects & the Timeline

The Digital Audio Workstation 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 due:* write an aural observation

#### 9/26 Digital Audio & Composing Musique Concrete & 1st quiz!

An introduction to how computers make sound; some basic techniques of Musique Concrete.

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

#### 10/3 Student Compositions #1

This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing more of our first compositions.

*assignment due:* make a piece of musique concrete using found recordings

#### 10/10 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

**10/17 Modifying the Sound Object: the Spectral Domain & 2nd quiz!**

Filtering as a compositional tool.

*please read:* Out of the Studios

*assignment due:* make a field recording or recordings that you will use in your 2<sup>nd</sup> composition.

**10/24 Modifying the Sound Object: the Time Domain**

Looping, phasing and delays as compositional tools.

*please read:* Computer Music

*assignment due:* continue making field recordings that you will use in your 2<sup>nd</sup> composition.

**10/31 Student Compositions #2 pt. 1**

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.

**11/7 Student Compositions #2 pt. 2 & 3rd quiz!**

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

**11/14 Experimental Composition: Design-Then-Do**

Thinking about composing as an experimental process.

*please read:* Where Are We Going?

**11/21 Student Run Class**

This class will be dedicated to any questions, comments or concerns regarding the coursework to date that students would care to address.

**11/28 Thanksgiving Break!**

**12/5 Student Compositions #3 pt. 1**

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

*assignment:* make a composition that uses a design (a score) as the primary compositional foundation.

*Hint:* your Aural Observation is a great idea!



**12/12 Student Compositions #3 pt. 2 & 4<sup>th</sup> and final quiz!**

This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing more of our final compositions.