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### MUS 121: Writing About Music (syllabus, zero cost)

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# MUS 121

## Writing about Music (for music majors)

Fall 2021: MONDAYS AND WEDNESDAYS, 9:15-10:30

Prof. Emily Wilbourne

B.Mus (Hons.) Dip.ML (It.) M.Mus (Musicology) *Melb.* MA (Music) PhD (Music) *NYU*

Associate Professor of Musicology

Queens College and the Graduate Center

[What to call me: Dr. Wilbourne, Dr. W, Prof. Wilbourne, Prof. W. On the rare occasion that I talk about myself in the third person, I use the pronoun “she/hers,” however I welcome any pronouns.]

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Elvis Costello famously said that writing about music is like dancing to architecture. These are compelling words, though their force relies in part on the irony of the formulation—in effect, the quote does exactly that which it (convincingly) claims is impossible to do, explicating in words something powerful about musical experience, specifically the difficulties of transposing musical experience into words.

In this class students will tackle two related questions. First, what is Western art music (commonly referred to as “Classical music”)? And second, how can we write (better) about Western art music? “Music 121: Writing about Music” is a College Writing 2 course and fulfills Gen Ed and Music department course requirements. Instruction about writing is included throughout the semester; students should come to each class prepared to write, to revise their own work, and to think constructively about the work of their peers.

This semester, as a response to the continuing COVID-19 crisis, MUS 121 will be taught entirely online. We will have weekly synchronous classes as well as asynchronous listening and reading assignments.

## CONTACT INFORMATION for PROF. WILBOURNE

Email: [emily.wilbourne@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:emily.wilbourne@qc.cuny.edu)

[During the semester I check my email several times a day, Monday through Friday (typically within business hours), and I will respond in a timely fashion. Please put your full name and the name of this class in the subject line as I have a large volume of email and many students.]

Office phone: (718) 997-3813

Office hours: W 1:40-2:25, or by appointment: Meeting ID: XXX Passcode: XXX. Please note that Zoom will automatically log me out after 45 minutes of inactivity, so come at the beginning of my office “hour” if you want to be sure to catch me.

## DESIRABLE LEARNING OUTCOMES

[These outcomes have been copied and pasted from the College Writing 2 webpage; the writing assignments for this class are designed to address these goals in a systematic way:

<http://collegewriting2.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/goals-for-college-writing-2/>]

1. Read and listen critically and analytically, including identifying an argument’s major assumptions and assertions and evaluating its supporting evidence.
2. Write clearly and coherently in varied, academic formats (such as formal essays, research papers, and reports) using standard English and appropriate technology to critique and improve one’s own and others’ texts.
3. Demonstrate research skills using appropriate technology, including gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing primary and secondary sources.
4. Support a thesis with well-reasoned arguments, and communicate persuasively across a variety of contexts, purposes, audiences, and media.
5. Formulate original ideas and relate them to the ideas of others by employing the conventions of ethical attribution and citation.

## COURSE DOCUMENTS

The course website is hosted through Google Classrooms. Links to all of the reading, lectures, and listening assignments can be found on the Google Classroom, and assignments will be submitted there, too. Students in the Monday section of the class can access the website with the code XXXX. Students in the Wednesday section should use the code XXXX. [If you do not know which section you are in, please check your email! I have written to you (via the email address listed in your CUNYfirst account) with full instructions.]

Instructions to access the website are as follows:

1. Go to [gdrive.qc.cuny.edu](https://gdrive.qc.cuny.edu)
2. Login with your CAMS account (looks like [jsmith100](mailto:jsmith100)), if you have forgotten your username or password, then visit [cams.qc.cuny.edu](https://cams.qc.cuny.edu) and click "Forgot Username or Password").
  - a. (If it's your first time logging in, accept terms and conditions).
3. Go to [classroom.google.com](https://classroom.google.com) (you may need to self-identify as a student). 4. Click the + button on the top right.
5. Add the relevant course code given above (all lowercase letters).

If, after logging in, it won't let you add the class, try the following: Sometimes it switches you back to your personal Google account if you have more than one logged in at a time. Open the account switcher by clicking on your initial or profile picture in the top right and enter your QC account. To set a specific Google account as the default for classroom/drive/etc., log out of all accounts and log back into the selected account before logging into any of the other Google accounts.

If technological difficulties persist, please contact the QC information technology help desk: <https://www.qc.cuny.edu/computing/HelpDesk/Pages/Welcome.aspx>

#### COURSE ORGANIZATION

As with all 3-credit classes, MUS 121 should take about 9 hours of your time per week. Each week you will have certain weekly tasks to complete: attend your live class session (Monday or Wednesday, depending on your section), listen to and comment on the recorded lecture (available as an audio file), read and comment on the weekly reading, and work on whichever written assignment is underway. Over the course of the semester there are three main written assignments; you are also required to meet with Prof. Wilbourne individually at least three times during the semester, two of which will be considered viva voce examinations. More detail on all the work that you will complete over the semester is provided below.

#### REQUIRED TEXTS AND TECHNOLOGY

- There is no required textbook for this class. Readings will be provided free of charge; links will be posted each week on the Google Classroom.
- All students will require access to the internet with a strong enough connection to participate in synchronous classes, listen to streaming music, (occasionally) watch videos, and to download and upload writing assignments.
- All students will need to access Zoom in order to attend synchronous classes. Please use your full (preferred) name and where possible, have your camera on. There is a lot of discussion during live classes and having your camera on will aid your participation. Endeavour to be in a location where you can sit and work without worrying about what appears in the Zoom window; sitting with your back to a wall

may help if you find yourself in a busy environment.

- All students will need a Dropbox account; you may use a free account, or access the one provided by CUNY (information on how to access and utilize the CUNY account is available here, though several people have had difficulty getting the CUNY one to work:

[https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/cis/technology-services/drop\\_box/](https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/cis/technology-services/drop_box/), click on the “LOG IN” button down on the left margin).

We will use Dropbox to store and comment on the weekly lecture. Links to the relevant files will be provided on the Google Classroom website.

- All students will need a free Hypothesis account with which to annotate pdfs of the weekly readings. Go here to sign up: <https://web.hypothes.is/start/> Once you have the account, you can download a Chrome extension or a bookmarklet for your preferred browser. We will set up a specific group for our class, so that only you, me, and your peers can read your comments.
- I also highly recommend a timer to help with time management and for use in several of our writing assignments; every member of my family has this one: [https://www.amazon.com/Secura-60-Minute-Classroom-Countdown-Management/dp/B07PGVNH59/ref=sr\\_1\\_7?dchild=1&keywords=timer&qid=1609791331&sr=8-7&th=1](https://www.amazon.com/Secura-60-Minute-Classroom-Countdown-Management/dp/B07PGVNH59/ref=sr_1_7?dchild=1&keywords=timer&qid=1609791331&sr=8-7&th=1), which is cute, cheap, and very functional. Mine is yellow, my partner’s is red, and my two kids have one each in blue and green respectively. You could try to use the timer function on your phone, however, as you will soon learn, I highly advise avoiding your phone while you’re trying to work, and having a separate timer helps facilitate that distance.

## WEEKLY TASKS

- Synchronous classes.

Each week students will attend one live class. Please note that I have split the class into two sections; one group will attend on Mondays, the other on Wednesdays. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO SWITCH SECTIONS AFTER THE FIRST WEEK. Based on the CUNY calendar (and the number of Mondays and Wednesdays), the two sections will move through the course material at slightly different speeds. All written assignments for the Monday section will be due on Fridays at midnight (four days after we meet), and all assignments for the Wednesday section will be due on Sundays at midnight (four days after we meet). You should come to class having completed the lecture and the reading, and ready to discuss and interact with your peers, including participation in live writing exercises and peer review.

Synchronous classes will be held via Zoom from 3:10-4:25pm; Meeting ID: 852 5878 6124; Passcode: ilovemusic. Alternatively you can click this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85258786124?pwd=a2U5bEFXcnBISXN6R0JvcHpFM2>

## [9FZz09](#)

- Asynchronous lecture.

Each week I will upload an asynchronous lecture to Dropbox and provide the link on Google Classrooms. This lecture will cover the history of and ideas about Western art music, particularly the period known as “Classical Music.” Each lecture should be completed before our live session. As a rule of thumb, if you are in the Monday section, you should plan to listen to the lecture on Wednesday (at that same scheduled time), and if you are in the Wednesday section, you should plan to listen to the lecture on Monday (at that scheduled time). While you are listening to the lecture, you need to annotate it using the Dropbox tools; these can be placed at the specific timestamp to which you are referring. Each week you should note down at least two observations and two questions that you have in regard to the material covered (my daughter’s fifth-grade class calls these “noticings” and “wonderings”). These comments are part of your participation grade. They let me know that you have completed the listening, and help to guide and shape the discussion we will have about the lecture during our synchronous class. Feel free to respond to your peers, and to engage in genuine discussion here. (We will cover how to insert these comments during our first class.)

- Weekly reading.

Each week I will upload a reading; the link will be provided through Google Classrooms. Again, you should complete this reading before our synchronous class, and again, you need to annotate the file with two observations (“noticings”) and two questions (“wonderings”). These comments contribute to your participation grade, and help to guide and shape the discussion we will have about the reading in our synchronous class. You will use Hypothesis to comment on the readings. [Previous iterations of this class used Dropbox to comment on the readings, but it proved too clunky and slow.]

- Each week you should do some work on the writing assignments!

This is a CW2 class, after all. Work on your writing assignments early and often--just like voting.

## SEMESTERLY TASKS (AKA ASSIGNMENTS)

Over the course of the semester there are three main writing assignments and three individual meetings with the course instructor. Details about each are provided here.

- Initial meeting with Prof. Wilbourne

I find online teaching hard. Not because I can’t manage the technical requirements and certainly not because I can’t waffle on into a microphone for a long time about music history (spoiler alert: I can talk, a lot!), but because the technology requires that most people are on mute most of the time, and I therefore have little sense of who you are. This initial meeting is for me to get a sense of who you are. I will send you a (short)

survey to fill out beforehand, but still, please come to the individual meeting prepared to have your camera on and to tell me a little about yourself. Sign ups will be available via the Google calendar attached to our Classroom.

- Mid-term meeting with Prof. Wilbourne (10%)

Unlike the first 1-on-1 meeting, this one is an exam and it is worth 10% of your final grade. The content of this exam will be the historical ideas that have been raised in lectures and discussed in class. Before this exam I will circulate a shortlist of possible topics, from which you will be asked to give a three-minute presentation on two (chosen randomly by me during the exam). You may bring whatever preparatory materials you wish. The exam will be held via Zoom and sign up will be available via the Google classroom calendar.

- Final meeting with Prof. Wilbourne (10%)

Similar to the mid-term, this meeting will involve a pre-circulated list of questions, on which you should be ready to present. As always, you may bring with you whatever preparatory materials you so desire. The exam will be held via Zoom and sign up will be available via the Google classroom calendar.

- Writing Assignment 1 (descriptive analysis). (3-4 pp., 15%)

In order to complete the three main Writing Assignments due over the course of the semester, students should select a piece of music that they are actively working on for performance (whether in their private lessons or in an ensemble, such as chamber music, orchestra, vocal ensemble, etc.). You will use the same piece for all three assignments, so select something that you feel excited about spending a sustained amount of time with. I recommend that you choose something from the Classical period, as we will cover that time period in the historical lectures, however, I am willing to hear your arguments about other pieces, too. Your selection will need to be approved by me before you write your first assignment.

Assignment 1 involves detailed description of the piece that you have selected (or portions of the piece, should you choose a long musical work). Describe first the musical work and then the listening experience in as much detail as possible. Note that the two aspects of the task will require different approaches. In the first instance, concentrate on finding precise language with which to convey the musical features of the piece; use the technical vocabulary that we have defined in class where appropriate (timbre, beat, metre, dynamics, texture, etc.). In the second, search out language that best captures the affect and effect of the music. Ask yourself: "What aspects of this music would an ideal listener focus on?", as well as, "How does this music make me feel?"

Your finished assignment should be 3-4 pages long and should include at least one embedded musical example (which will not count as part of the required pages).

- Writing Assignment 2 (programme notes). (5-6 pp., 15%)

Utilizing the same piece of music that you used for WA1, construct an essay that could accompany a performance of the piece. You will need to do research on the piece and to summarize the information that is known about the composer, the work, the original performance context, the various meanings that have accrued to the piece in the time since it was written, and the kinds of places in which music of this genre and style are (or were) regularly performed. You are welcome to incorporate edited versions of sections of writing that you previously submitted as WA1.

Your finished assignment should be 5-6 pages long and should include properly formatted citations referencing the sources on which you rely.

- Writing Assignment 3 (cultural critique). (19-10 pp., 30%)

Construct an argument about the piece that you have been studying and about the culture within which the work was created and appreciated. I am interested in your interpretation of how this music was utilized by contemporary audiences and what the music meant to the listeners (and/or performers) during that time. How did the formal features of this music enable certain kinds of behaviors? What insight does this music give us into the culture of the past? You are welcome to incorporate edited versions of sections of writing that you previously submitted as WA1 and/or WA2.

Your finished assignment should be 9-10 pages long. It should incorporate a thesis that you support with primary and secondary evidence. You should refer to at least one embedded musical example (which will not count as part of the required pages). You must provide properly formatted citations referencing the primary and secondary sources on which you rely, as well as a bibliography of consulted sources.

- Participation (20%)

A whopping 20% of your final grade is based on your participation in class discussions; in low-stakes, in-class or asynchronous writing assignments; and in the “noticings” and “wonderings” that you will provide for each audio lecture and weekly reading assignment. Basically, as long as you are turning up and keeping up, you will get full credit. If you are encountering difficulties making it to class or completing your assignments, please get in touch with me as soon as possible. I want to see you succeed. If you need help, please ask.



## ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Participation (including comments on readings and lectures, as well as the completion of in-class writing exercises and draft materials)	20%
Writing assignment 1 (descriptive analysis)	15%
Writing assignment 2 (programme notes)	15%
Writing assignment 3 (research paper)	30%
Mid-term viva voce exam	10%
End-of-semester viva voce exam	10%

## ASSESSMENT POLICIES

Please note that the due dates for the three written assignments are “set in stone.” These are larger assignments and you will need to budget time for them in the weeks preceding their completion--not only the night before submission. If you need an extension, please contact me in advance of the due date and explain your difficulties. Unless I hear from you before the work is due, I cannot make an allowance. If a last-minute crisis derails your completion, please submit your current draft along with an explanation of what is missing. I will give you a prorated grade based on what you managed to complete.

I will provide grading rubrics for all assignments, including the viva voce exams. These will help you know where to focus your preparation, and help you understand what you can do better next time. The comments (“noticings and wonderings”) that you post for each lecture and reading contribute to your participation grade. As long as you complete these before the relevant class, you get the participation grade; if you miss this deadline, you will still need to do the work in order to answer the midterm and finals questions, but you will not receive the participation grade for comments that post late.

## SEMESTER OUTLINE AND DUE DATES

It is possible to view the course calendar (and deadlines for the larger assignments) via Google classrooms; once logged in, click on the three bar icon for the main menu (on the far left corner of your screen), and then select "Calendar." You can choose to see due dates for just this class or all classes in which you are enrolled.

Please note that the instructor may change this syllabus at their discretion over the course of the semester; students will be notified in writing of any changes.

### MONDAY SECTION DUE DATES:

Initial meeting with Prof. Wilbourne: By the end of Week 2 (Friday, 10 September)

Writing Assignment 1: 11:59pm, Friday, 27 September

Mid-term, viva voce: By the end of Week 8 (Friday, 29 October)

Writing Assignment 2: 11:59pm, Friday, 5 November

Writing Assignment 3: 11:59pm, Friday, 17 December

Final exam, viva voce: By end of Week 15 (Friday, 17 December)

### WEDNESDAY SECTION DUE DATES:

Initial meeting with Prof. Wilbourne: By the end of Week 2 (Friday, 10 September)

Writing Assignment 1: 11:59pm, Sunday, 29 September

Mid-term, viva voce: By the end of Week 8 (Friday, 29 October)

Writing Assignment 2: 11:59pm, Sunday, 31 October

Writing Assignment 3: 11:59pm, Sunday, 12 December

Final exam, viva voce By end of Week 15 (Friday, 17 December)

## REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Candidates with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: 1) register with and provide documentation to the Special Services Office, Frese Hall, Room 111; 2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to Queens College candidates, visit the website, or contact: Special Service Office; Director, Miriam Detres-Hickey, Frese Hall, Room 111; 718-997-5870.

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