

# Syllabus

## Music Theories of the World (MT411)

**Boston University, Spring 20xx**

**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00–12:15, CFA Room xxx**

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*Credits:* 3

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**Overview:** Music theory is a necessary part of music making in all its forms. In order to compose, perform, improvise, or critique music, regardless of style, genre, or culture, some conceptual framework is necessary or implicit. Whether a theory is written down, taught formally or informally, or simply learned by example, it is an essential component of every musical tradition. Theory also tends to have little regard for ethnic, racial, and class-based ways of categorizing music, and moves fluidly from one musical practice to another, regardless of whether one music or the other is folk, classical, popular, black, white, European, African, etc.

Standard music theory teaching in American institutions comes from a European tradition that has changed relatively little in two hundred years. Bringing music from outside of that tradition into that pedagogical framework does little service to that music, since it simply serves to measure them against the norms of a foreign style. The goal of this course will be to study music theory from within a variety of different traditions. These are *indigenous* music theories, ways of conceptualizing musical materials that come from the practitioners of that tradition. By learning many different such theories in one course, we will discover not only the diversity of human music theories but also the large universe concepts shared between often very different kinds of music making. We will not shy away from other tradition's appropriations of European theory in search of a fictitious "pure" culture. Rather, we will foster a critical perspective towards how theoretical frameworks are constructed and communicated, by whom or for whom.

The traditions covered in this course are necessarily a small selection out of a large universe. I have chosen them with a variety of goals in mind: geographic and ethnic diversity, range of musical parameters central to the theories, availability of resources, and potential relevance to students' musical experiences.

**Course Objectives (Course specific):** Upon completing MT411 students will

- Be familiar with multiple ways of conceptualizing the elements of musical expression,
- Appreciate the diversity of human musical thought,
- Understand some of the universal and shared elements of musical thought across cultures,
- Have some experience with ways of making music in a number of musical traditions from different parts of the world.
- Gain experience in engaging with different kinds of music in different modalities: as listener, interpreter, performer, composer.

### ***Hub Objectives, Global Citizenship and Intercultural Literacy:***

- Students will demonstrate, through comparative analysis of music-theoretic systems, an understanding of global diversity in methods of music making and musical thought.

### ***Hub Objectives, Creativity and Innovation:***

- Students will demonstrate understanding of creativity in music composition and/or performance as a learnable, iterative process of imagining new possibilities that involves risk-taking, use of multiple strategies, and reconceiving in response to feedback, and will be able to identify individual and institutional factors that promote and inhibit creativity.

- Students will be able to exercise their own potential for engaging in creative activity by conceiving and executing an original work in the form of a musical composition and/or musical performance or improvisation, drawing upon the theory of one of the musical traditions studied in the course.

**Readings:** The course is structured around readings from a variety of sources. These are listed in the **reading list and bibliography** for the course on blackboard.

**Discussion leaders:** We will divide most of the classes between lecture and discussion. Students will lead discussions for most of the readings. Look over the reading list to decide what you like to lead discussions on.

When you are discussion leader, bring • questions for discussion, and • demonstration materials, such as audio, video, or images, relating to the topic. Remember that the goal is not to do all of the talking yourself, so think about preparing questions that will be good for provoking discussion.

**Course Design:** The schedule is divided into overlapping units focusing on musical topics, and on musical traditions. Here is the general scheme:

Weeks	Topic	Traditions
1–2	Tuning and tone systems	China
		Persia
3–4	Melody and mode	Indonesia
5–7		Japan
		Persian and Arab
8–9	Rhythm	Hindu
10		
11		West Africa
12		Latin America

For most of the traditions we consider, we'll look at more than one theoretical area from that tradition, and where possible, we will continue with one tradition as we shift from one theory topic to another. However, we will divide the semester initially on the basis of the theory topics, rather than the traditions, in order to facilitate a comparative perspective.

**Assignments:** There will be three projects to complete for the course. The first is a comparative essay on tone systems (2/25).

The second and third projects are on melody and modal systems (3/23) and rhythm (4/20). For each of these projects there are multiple options to choose from, one of which is a comparative essay, and others are creative projects. Each student will choose a creative project for *at least one* of these two assignments. These include improvised performances and musical compositions. Students will share their creative projects with the class and discuss their process and have an opportunity for discussion and feedback from their peers and the instructor. They will then revise their compositions or prepare new performances and all students will bring these back to share in the last week of class, and discuss what they changed.

**Grade breakdown:**

Discussion leading and participation: 25%

Assignments: 60%

Final performance/presentation: 15%

**Online Resources:**

- **Blackboard.** <http://blackboard.bu.edu>. Get lecture notes, assignments, course information, and scores.

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend all class meetings. If you miss a class, you are responsible for going over what was covered on that day. Homework may be turned in late in the event of an excused absence, such as illness, official school business, extenuating family circumstances, or observance of religious holidays.

**Late work:** Assignments turned in after the due date will not be accepted, except in the case of an excused absence.

**Antiracism:** While antiracism cannot be reduced to the issue of diversity, the representation of the diversity of musicians and composers is integral to the goal of promoting racial equity in music. In this course an effort is made to increase the presence of works representing populations who have been historically excluded from courses and curricula in schools of music, and to provide an atmosphere of learning and performing that is inclusive and equitable.

**Conduct:** You are expected to abide by the CFA Academic Conduct Code. Cases of suspected misconduct will be referred to the Dean's Office.

**Electronic Devices:** Cell phones are to be turned off in class. If your phone rings, you must silence it immediately and may not answer it during class time. Laptops and tablets may be used for in-class activities, displaying course materials, and taking notes. They are not to be used for extraneous activities such as email or social media. Please turn off notifications while in class to avoid distractions.

**Disabilities:** You A student with disabilities must register with the Office of Disability Services prior to the beginning of the first term for which the assistance is being requested. Students will be requested to provide current appropriate documentation of their disability.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments	Discussion Leader
1/26 (Tue)	Intro/What is Music Theory?			
1/28 (Thr)	Tuning and Tone systems: China	Chen		
2/2 (Tue)	Persia	Farhat		
2/4 (Thr)	Bali	Tenzer, Ch. 1		
2/9 (Tue)	Melody and mode: Java	Perlman		
2/11 (Thr)		Martopangrawit		
2/18 (Thr)	Bali	Tenzer, Chs. 4–6		
2/23 (Tue)		Vitale		
2/25 (Thr)	Japan	Komoda & Nogawa	Assignment 1	
3/2 (Tue)	Persia	Miller		
3/4 (Thr)	Arab	Farraj & Shumays		
3/9 (Tue)		Farraj & Shumays		
3/11 (Thr)	Hindu	Jairazbhoy		
3/16 (Tue)		Srivastra		
3/23 (Tue)	Student creative projects		Assignment 2	
3/25 (Thr)	Rhythm: Hindu	Kippen		
3/30 (Tue)		Clayton		
4/1 (Thr)	Africa	Agawu		
4/6 (Tue)		Ladzekpo		
4/8 (Thr)		Anku		
4/13 (Tue)		Anku		
4/15 (Thr)	Carribbean	Peñalosa		
4/20 (Tue)		Peñalosa	Assignment 3	
4/22 (Thr)	Student creative projects			
4/27 (Tue)	Student creative projects round 2			
4/29 (Thr)	Student creative projects round 2			

### Sample Assignments (subject to change):

**Assignment 1 (2/25), Comparative essay (Tuning theories):** Write a short essay (3–5 pages double spaced) in response to the following questions. Base your essay on class readings (Chen, Farhat, Tenzer, and Perlman), and optionally on additional sources.

What are some of the constraints that have shaped theories of tuning in different cultures? How do theoretical differences like pentatonic vs. heptatonic scale system and attitudes towards tuning flexibility interact with other aspects of musical style, such as instrumentation, textural norms, and melody and modal systems?

**Assignment 2 (3/25), Option 1, Comparative essay (Modal theory):** Write a short essay (3–5 pages double spaced) in response to the following questions. Base your essay on class readings (Farhat, Miller, Farraj and Abu Shumays, Jairazbhoy, Srivastava), and optionally on additional sources.

Compare how the theories of different musical cultures, especially Persian, Arabic, and Hindu, optionally including also Japanese, Javanese, and/or Balinese, systematize concepts relating to mode and scale. What elements are similar across cultures? What aspects are unique to specific traditions?

**Assignment 2 (3/25), Option 2a, Performance:** Choose a rag, preferably one we discuss in class or a common one for which you can draw upon multiple sources from *The Raga Guide*, Srivastava, Bagchee, or other sources, and find multiple recorded vocal performances of that rag. Listen to performances of the alap for your chosen rag and write about what you hear in them: typical melodic shapes that stand out, places where grace notes or gliding tones seem to be typically used, how rhythm is used to shape the melodic gestures, how the alap develops over time. Compare to theoretical descriptions of the rag from the *Raga Guide* and other sources. Then use all of these observations to craft your own performance. In your performance, sing a short alap using Hindu solfège (Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni), and using an electronic tambura, or perform on an appropriate instrument (such as violin or cello).

**Assignment 2 (3/25), Option 2b, Composition:** Compose a piece of music for an instrument or group of instruments of your choice using ideas from Persian *dastgah* theory or Arabic *maqam* theory. This may include a monodic composition for a single-line instrument or voice.

**Assignment 3 (4/15), Option 1, Comparative essay (Rhythmic theory):** Write a short essay (3–5 pages) discussing one or more theoretical concept relating to rhythm, and how it operates (or doesn't) in different musical traditions, Indian, African, and/or Latin American, drawing upon readings for the course. Consider one or more of the following concepts:

- Meter
- Beat
- Accent
- Cycle
- Periodicity
- Polymeter
- Polyrrhythm
- Free rhythm

**Assignment 3 (4/15), Option 2a, Composition:** Write an original piece of music for any instruments using ideas from rhythmic theories of Indian, African, Cuban, and/or Latin jazz music. Write a description of approximately a page explaining your process and how you apply these theories in the piece.

**Assignment 3 (4/15), Option 2b, Model Composition:** Write a piece of “African Piano Music” modeled on Nketia’s pieces (“Owora,” “Libation,” “Meditation,” “Akpalu,” “Volta Fantasy,” “Dagomba”). Write a 1-page explanation of the features you identified in Nketia’s pieces (rhythm and any other features) and how you applied them in your own.

## Readings:

- Chen, Yingshi. "Theory and Notation in China." In *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Vol. 7 (East Asia)*, ed. R.C. Provine, Y. Tokumaru, & J.L. Witzleben. Routledge, 2001: 153–163.
- Farhat, Hormoz. *The Dastgāh Concept in Persian Music*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.  
**Ch.2: Intervals and scales in contemporary Persian music**
- Tenzer, Michael. *Gamelan Gong Kebyar: The Art of Twentieth-Century Balinese Music*. U. of Chicago P., 2000.  
**Ch. 2: "Kebyar orchestral resources"**  
**Ch. 4, "Contexts for Kebyar Theory" from p. 124 "Recent history of music theory in Java and Bali,"**  
**Ch. 6: "Melody and figuration"**
- Perlman, Marc. *Unplayed Melodies: Javanese Gamelan and the Genesis of Music Theory*. ACLS, 2004.  
**Ch. 2: "A brief introduction to *karawitan*"**
- Martopangrawit, R.L. *Notes on Knowledge of Gamelan Music* (trans. M.F. Hatch). In *Source Readings in Javanese Gamelan and Vocal Music*, ed. J. Becker, A.H. Feinstein, vols. 1–2, 1984.  
**vol. 1, pp. 40–63: On tuning, pathet, and slendro**  
**vol. 2, pp. 129–141: On pelog pathet and mode**
- Vitale, Wayne. "Balinese Kebyar Music Breaks the Five-Tone Barrier: New Composition for Seven-Tone Gamelan." *Perspectives of New Music* 40(2): 2002, 5–69.
- Komoda, Haruko, and Minoko Nogawa, "Theory and Notation in Japan." In *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Vol. 7 (East Asia)*, ed. R.C. Provine, Y. Tokumaru, & J.L. Witzleben. Routledge, 2001: 601–619.
- Miller, Lloyd. *Music and Song in Persia: The Art of Āvāz*. Curzon Press, 1999.  
**Chapter 4: "The theory of Persian music"**
- Farraj, Johnny, and Sami Abu Shumays. *Inside Arabic Music: Arabic Maqam Performance and Theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Oxford University Press, 2019.  
**Chapters 13–14: "The Jins," "The most common Anjas"**  
**Chapters 17–19: "The Maqam," "The Maqam scale," "Modulation"**
- Jairazbhoy, Nazir Ali, *The Rags of North Indian Music: Their Structure and Evolution*. Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1971.  
**Ch. 1: "An outline of present-day North Indian classical music"**  
**Ch. 2: "Basic elements of theory"**  
**Ch. 3: "Thāt"**
- Srivastava, Indurama, *A Practical Guide to North Indian Classical Vocal Music: The Ten Basic rāgs with Compositions and Improvisations*. Munshiram Manoharlal, 2008.  
**Ch. 3: The Performance**
- Kippen, James, "Folk Grooves and *Tabla Tāl*-s." *Echo: A Music-Centered Journal* 3/1 (2001).
- Clayton, Martin. 2008. *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance*. Oxford U.P..  
**Ch. 4: *Tāl* theory as a model of rhythmic organization**  
**Ch. 5: *Tāl* in practice: Qualitative, quantitative, and cyclic functions**
- Agawu, Kofi. *The African Imagination in Music*. Oxford University Press. 2016.  
**Ch. 4: The Rhythmic Imagination**
- Ladzekpo, C.K. "Rhythmic Principles." *Foundation Course in African Music*.  
<http://www.richardhodes.com/ladzekpo/PrinciplesFr.html>
- Anku, Willie. 1997. "Principles of Rhythm Integration in African Drumming." *Black Music Research Journal* 17(2): 211–38.
- Anku, Willie. 2000. "Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music." *Music Theory Online* 6/1.
- Peñalosa, David. *The Clave Matrix: Afro-Cuban Rhythm, It's Principles and Origins*. Bembe Books, 2009.