
subject catalogue S23 K24

course code KOX020

name of course

Modern Compositional Techniques

specification

for Composition and Electronic Music program, elective for others

academic instructor

L.Hirsch

prerequisite course

no of terms

3

contact hr/total

95.0

hr/term

31.7

hr/week

1.5

ECTS/total

9.00

Lect

90.0

Grp

0.0

Ind

10.0

Sem

0.0

Pract

0.0

graded or pass/fail exams

A

E

E

term

1

2

3

ECTS

3.00

3.00

3.00

3.00

aim of the subject

The purpose of this course is to explore a variety of compositional techniques, repertoire, concepts, and aesthetics from the recent past, and to provide students interested in composition with the basic tools needed to compose effectively in contemporary idioms. Because music history and theory curricula focus primarily on music from the “common practice” era (1750-1900), this course supplements that material by focusing on music composed since 1900. The course is required for all undergraduate composition and electronic music majors.

content

I Semester (Autumn A1):

1. Diatonic modes and their use in the works of composers over the past 70 years, examining musical examples. (New

Simplicity)

2. Symmetrical modes based on equal temperament (standard tuning), with a special focus on octatonic scales and their manifestations in the music of Messiaen, Tormis, Vasks, Crumb, Stravinsky, and others.
3. Simple C-Sound files for developing tone rows. Departing from the equal temperament system and using microtonal tunings as well as tunings based on the overtone series. Examples from G.F. Haas, Grisey, Murail, and others. Different types of pitch notation; a) MIDI numbers, b) C-Sound's octave point pitch class system allowing various tunings, c) pitch notation in Hertz and a retrospective on the historical main issue - the Pythagorean and Ptolemaic comma.
4. Autonomization of parameters and an introduction to the main objectives of dodecaphony and serialism. This includes individual dodecaphonic exercises. Examining examples by Webern and Dallapiccola.
5. Additive rhythm and metric modulation. Individual tasks inspired by Elliott Carter and Ligeti's Autumn in Warsaw, as well as Messiaen's concept of added value.
6. Main notational developments of the 20th century: a) graphical additional symbols - notation of clusters (Cowell, Penderecki), b) proportional notation without time signatures from the post-World War II American years, c) Lutoslawski's "controlled aleatory boxes" and their extensions, d) acceleration-deceleration with long beams, various quarter-tone symbols, etc.
7. Use of natural harmonics on string instruments. Examples: the beginning of Unsuk Chin's Violin Concerto, Tan Dun's Silence with a theme by Purcell, and others.

II Semester (Spring E2):

1. Micro polyphony and improvisatory textures. Examples from the music of: György Ligeti (Lux Aeterna, Atmospheres), Yannis Xenakis, Earle Brown (String Quartet (1965))
2. Timbral modulation, rhythmic modulation, phase modulation, articulation modulation. Examples from the music of Gerard Grisey (Les Espaces Acoustiques), Yannis Xenakis, Steve Reich.
3. Spatialisation. Possibilities for creating different sounding spaces, their execution in the score.
4. Graphical and non linear notation. Observing works by: John Cage (Piano concerto), Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff (For 1, 2 or 3 players, Edges), Antoine Beuger etc.
5. James Tenney Postal Pieces and aesthetics of process music.

6. Beating phenomena and its timbral and rhythmical possibilities. Examples from analogue electronics, Alvin Lucier, Eliane Radigue etc.

7. Writing text scores (different grammatical possibilities). Finding means to create a situation for particular soundings. Observing works by: Christian Wolff (Prose collection), Pauline Oliveros, Michael Pisaro, Alvin Lucier, fluxus artists.

III Semester (Autumn E3):

1. Proportional notation, possible difficulties and benefits. Organising the score. Observing works by: Gerard Grisey (Periodes, Partiels, Modulations),

Morton Feldman's early compositional period (O'Hara Songs, Voices and Pianos)

Horatiu Radulescu (Before the Universe was Born, Das Andere)

2. Non-linear notation, some reasons and benefits. Morton Feldman's The King of Denmark, Intersections. Learning the score, listening to different performances, reading articles.

3. Extended techniques and musique concrete instrumentale according to the works of Helmut Lachenmann.

4. Brief history of microtonality. Looking into the scores of Carillo, Scelsi, Johnston, Tenney, Haas, Sabat.

5. Natural flageolets on string instruments. Their pitch changes according to cent values. Learning higher partials and their notation possibilities.

6. An introduction to historical tunings and Just Intonation and Helmholtz-Ellis notation system. Examples from the music of Marc Sabat, Konstantin Heuer and renaissance theoreticians Vincentino and Zarlino.

(7. Mathematical and stochastic processes in music, indeterminacy. Examples from the music of Xenakis, Stockhausen and Cage.)

learning outcomes

On completion of the course, the student will have composed

- a modal or polymodal piece

- a dodecaphonic or serial piece
- a piece exploring a variety of metres, metrical modulation or additive rhythm
- a piece making use of new graphic symbols for notation

Each of these pieces is 2-3 minutes long, composed for 1-5 instruments, and will desirably result in a preliminary recording, providing the student with some experience of using, in one's own compositions, those techniques and aspects of modern music.

assessment

Final grades will be based upon composition projects, and attendance/class participation. Both components will count for 50% of the grade.

assessment criteria

A student receives credit if they have attended and participated in at least half of the lectures and have successfully completed the homework assignments.

Grade "poor" (E) is awarded to a student:

- if they have attended most of the lectures and have attempted the written assignments but unsuccessfully.

Grade "satisfactory" (D) is awarded to a student:

- if they have participated in most of the lectures and have attempted the written assignments, with some parts being correct.

Grade "good" (C) is awarded to a student:

- if they have participated in the lectures and about 50% of the written assignments done in class and at home are correct.

Grade "very good" (B) is awarded to a student:

- if they have a good grasp of the material covered, but there are some gaps in their knowledge.

Grade "excellent" (A) is awarded to a student:

- if the written assignments are correct and they navigate the material covered freely and smoothly.

course reading material

Kostka, Stefan. *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth-Century Music*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall Books, 2006.

Cope, David. *Techniques of the Contemporary Composer*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1997.

Dallin, Leon. *Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition*. Dubuque, Iowa, W.C. Brown Co., 1974.

Donato, Anthony. *Preparing Musical Manuscript*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977; 1963.

Messiaen, Olivier. *Technique of my Musical Language*. Paris, 1942.

Stone, Kurt. *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1980.

Cope, David. *Techniques of the Contemporary Composer*

Xenakis, Yannis. *Formalised Music : Thought and Mathematics in Composition*

Tenney, James. *A History of 'Consonance' and 'Dissonance'*

John Cage and the Theory of Harmony

Form in 20th Century Music

Lely, John and Saunders, James. *Word Events. Perspectives on Verbal Notation*.

Sabat, Marc. *Shadings in the Chromatic Field*

The Extended Helmholtz Ellis JI Pitch Notation

Ross, Alex. *The Rest is Noise. Morton Feldman Essay*

author of course description

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