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16 August 2006

<u>*Provisional*</u> *course title:* **Simple semiotic analysis of music**

<u>*Provisional*</u> *course description*

This course attempts to provide a theoretical and practical basis for understanding music as a form of interhuman communication. Such an attempt, however modest, is, I would argue, of considerable use at a time and in a culture whose omnipresent and ubiquitous audiovisual media disseminate 'messages' relying mainly on symbolic systems (auditive and visual, with or without words) that have tended to escape the analytical eye of the largely logocentric legacy of learning in the West.

Any viable approach to understanding musical 'meaning' will need to address at least three theoretical 'holy trinities': [1] emitter/channel/receiver; [2] icon/index/arbitrary sign; [3] syntax/semantics/pragmatics. Now, conventional musicology in the West has, for reasons presented in lesson 1, traditionally concerned itself with the *syntax* of music in the European art music tradition —the 'channel' or idealised 'music itself'— and paid only marginal attention to other musics, even less to the semantics and pragmatics of any music. This course seeks partialy to redress that imbalance.

Another problem with conventional Western learning about music is its tendency to effectively disqualify the popular majority of culturally competent music users as unmusical, even though they can in a matter of milliseconds distinguish musically, without verbal cues, between, say, imminent murder and a carefree country stroll, or between rap and a romantic tone poem. Since the inability to read Western music notation and unfamiliarity with the terminology of Western 'music theory' have never been obstacles to the practical comprehension and use of music on an everyday basis, there is no good reason why *general* music education should disregard such everyday musical competence. The trouble for music education and research is that while the signification of verbal and visual symbols can be discussed using metalanguage accessible to any educated person, the discussion of music as meaningful non-verbal sound does so very rarely. This course attempts to tackle those epistemic obstacles and provides pointers for those interested in creating a viable meta-musical vocabulary of structural-semantic denotors. To this end, the course will include numerous short music examples in MP3 format. Music needs much more than words to explain its workings: music primarily needs *music* to explain music, to put the matter in tautological terms.

The course falls into two roughly equal parts: [1] background explanations, concepts, theory and method; [2] application of method and the identification of *musicogenic* categories of thought.

Main aim

Any student, with or without formal musical training, who diligently follows all eight lessons should be able to apply concepts and methods presented during the course when attempting to discuss, in an informed manner, questions of musical signification.

Lessons (<u>provisional</u> presentation)

1. What is music and what is musical 'meaning'?

- Music as an anthropologically universal phenomenon but *not* a universal concept, even less a universal 'language'.
- Pre-history: language and music; wails and whales; music as a (*the?*) central domain of human representation.

Reading: P Tagg: *A Short Prehistory of Western Music*, pp. 1-17.
| http://tagg.org/xpdfs/origins1-2.pdf |

2. How come music affects us so concretely but is so hard to talk about in con-crete terms?

- Music and the 'great epistemic divide' in Western knowledge: 'absolute' music, notational centricity and syntax fixation.
- Four musical competences: constructional/poïetic, receptional/esthesic, metatex-tual, metacontextual.
- Four challenges to conventional musicological wisdom: 'ethno', 'socio', 'semio' and popular music studies.
- Critical review of existing semiotic approaches to music; semiotics and the denota-tion of musicogenic categories (*functional embodiment*).

Reading: P Tagg: *Ten Little Title Tunes*, pp. 3-57. 2003: New York & Montréal, Mass Media Music Scholars' Press. These pages online at | http://tagg.org/bookxtrax/titles/Ch1.pdf | and |.../Chr2.pdf |.

Listening (p. 20) online at
| http://tagg.org/audio/BachCPE-Rondo5(Cm-1791-start).mp3 |
(641 kb, MP3 mono, 96 kps at 22,050).

3. Parameters of musical expression (comprehensible for non-musicologists)

- Time, tempo, rhythm, metre, polyrhythm, duration, pulse rate, surface rate, perio-dicity.
- Pitch, range, ambitus, tessitura.
- Tonality, polyphony, harmony, counterpoint, homophony, heterophony, etc.
- Timbre, instrumentation, dynamics, acoustic space and positioning.
- Musemes and musematic compounds.

Reading: PowerPoint presentation *Simple Semiotic Music Analysis*
| http://tagg.org/teaching/analys/SemioMus.ppt |
Encyclopedia entries *accompaniment, antiphony, drone, harmony* (includes *chord, counterpoint, homophony, polyphony*), *melody, note, pitch, polyphony* | http://tagg.org/texts.html#Epmow |.

Listening: Zip file of very short audio examples, yet to be produced, to illustrate/explain concepts and phenomena.

4-5. *Musematic analysis*

- A simple sign typology for music: starting point for conceptualisation in musical practice, not in linguistic theory (musicogenicity again).
- Anaphones (sonic, kinetic, tactile); genre synecdoches; episodic markers; style indicators.
- Vocal persona.
- Music as 'metalanguage' for music: intersubjective and interobjective (intertextual) method, hypothetical substitution (commutation); musical and paramusical connotation.

Reading. Tagg: *Towards a sign typology of music* | http://tagg.org/articles/trento91.html | Tagg: *Introductory notes to the Semiotics of Music* | http://tagg.org/xpdfs/semiotug.pdf | (to be revised).

Listening: Zip file of very short audio examples, yet to be produced, to illustrate/explain concepts and phenomena.

6. *Abba's* **Fernando** *(1)*

- Attacking the analysis object: table of musemes, museme nomenclature, graphic score, chronometric grid, unequivocal structural denotation (real-time markings).
- Wide open spaces, picture-postcard exoticism, monocentric panning, 'sincere' and 'concerned' vocal delivery, teen angels, 'ethnic' folk lutes.

Reading. P Tagg: *Fernando the Flute*, pp. 1-50. 2000: New York & Montréal, Mass Media Music Scholars' Press.

Viewing/listening. PowerPoint presentation *Fernando the Flute*. 3 Meg + another 67 Meg of MP3 files (for lessons 5-6: music examples not yet added to PowerPoint).

7. *Abba's* **Fernando** *(2)*

- Propulsion markers; tritones, longing and cadential resolution; disco glitter and happy dancing.
- Musical processes: from [A] lots of 'there and then' and a little 'here and now' to [B] a little bit of 'there and then' and lots of 'here and now'.
- Lyrics and music: three different versions (English, Spanish, Swedish) to basically the same music; different mixes for different cultures
- Beyond 'the music': the pragmatics of *Fernando* and musically mediated ideology.

Reading. P Tagg: *Fernando the Flute*, pp. 51-123. 2000: New York & Montréal, Mass Media Music Scholars' Press.

Listening/viewing. As for lesson 5.

8. *Ideology and gestural interconversion: Austria, shampoo and the right type of love*

- Reception test and results: how can AUSTRIA and SHAMPOO be completely compatible musicogenic categories?
- Romance and pathos: the suppression of anguish?
- Erotic, romantic and parental love: spot —and learn— the difference!
- Conclusions: simple music semiotics and ideology critique through the analysis of musicogenic categorisation.

Reading. [1] P Tagg: 'Gestural interconversion and connotative precision'. In *Film International* #13/2005. Online as |http://tagg.org/articles/xpdfs/filminternat0412.pdf|;

[2] P Tagg: *Antidepressants and musical anguish management*
|http://tagg.org/articles/xpdfs/filminternat0412.pdf|

Viewing/listening. PowerPoint presentation *Which type of love? Ideology and connotative precision in TV music: Olwen, Austria and Shampoo*.
|http://tagg.org/Clips/OlwenSemioticon.zip| (to be revised).