

Music 9726: Fall 2025
MUSIC AND TRAUMA

Instructor: Emily Abrams Ansari
Office hours: Wednesdays, 2-4pm, TC229
Course delivery format: In person

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Course Description

When it comes to events that the human mind struggles to process or verbalize—those with the potential to induce trauma—music has frequently proven a powerful mechanism for documentation, examination, memorialization, and even healing. This course examines theories of trauma, post-traumatic stress, resilience, and post-traumatic growth in light of their potential for aiding interpretation of musical works that deal with potentially traumatic experiences, both individual and collective. We also undertake an overview of some of the existing literature on music and trauma, considering music from a wide range of styles and genres. Students will apply theories of trauma to consider both musical reactions to our present moment and musical works from history.

Course Materials

Our course is associated with its own Brightspace site (<https://westernu.brightspace.com>). All assigned readings will be available in electronic form on the relevant Brightspace page for each class. Almost all assignments will be submitted through our Brightspace site. All course materials will be provided by the instructor. There are no anticipated costs for students.

Method of Evaluation

Attendance and participation	15%
Weekly discussion comments contributions	10%
Short paper	25%
Final project presentation	20%
Final project paper	30%

Assignments/Tasks

1. Participation

Part of your participation grade (5%) will be based on self-assessment of your participation. The remaining 10% will be calculated by me and will be based on your participation in class discussion.

2. Weekly discussion comments

Submit a short message by email with questions that the readings raised for you, elements you did not understand from the readings, and issues raised by the readings that you would like to explore further in class discussion to EAA by noon the day before class.

3. Short Essay

Write a short description of a suitable model from the trauma studies literature that you might use for analyzing a piece of music that deals with trauma. If you were to write a full-length analysis of this piece using this particularly trauma theory, which elements of the theory would you focus on and would you use this frame to interpret the music's exploration of the traumatic experience? 800-1200 words. Submit here as a Word document attachment by **October 6**.

4. Final Project

This project, which you will work on alone through the semester, can consider any aspect of the intersection of music and trauma. If you wish, it can carry through the analysis proposed in the Short Essay.

- a) Submit a brief project proposal over Brightspace to Prof. Ansari by **November 10**. This should include a brief (1-2 paragraph) overview of your planned project, and a provisional bibliography. Submit as a Word document attachment.
- b) Give a 15-20 minute presentation about your project during one of our final two class meetings.
- c) Write an 15-20 page paper and submit through Brightspace as a Word document by **December 11**.

Course Timeline and Format

For a timeline of the course, see the schedule below. This course will be taught face-to-face.

Graduate Course Learning Objectives

1. Students will gain an understanding of how theoretical models from other fields, including those from beyond the humanities, can be applied in the analysis and interpretation of musical works.
2. Students will develop a more holistic approach to the study of music, transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries both within and beyond music scholarship, while learning how to draw relevant research materials and analytical models from across an array of disciplines.
3. Students will improve their scholarly research and writing skills, including methods for researching the current moment.
4. Students will improve their presentation skills for a range of contexts.
5. Students will learn how to work collaboratively and to explore challenging issues of our own times.
6. Students will improve their ability to read critically and synthesize scholarly writing for others

Enrolment Restrictions

Enrolment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Music, as well as any student who has obtained special permission from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Note especially that plagiarism is a major scholastic offence. Students are expected to write all assignments in their own words. If you take an idea from another author, you must acknowledge this by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Health and Wellness Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessible Education Western (AEW)

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI may be used to assist with researching your paper topics and will minor grammar issues. It may not be used to generate text for the paper.

Use of Plagiarism Software

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Class Environment

When tackling this kind of material in a course, it is essential that our virtual classroom provides a safe and respectful environment where everyone can feel comfortable both asking questions and voicing their ideas. This being said, I also think that discomfort is often necessary as part of the learning process. There will be moments when we discuss difficult issues that you may not have addressed in previous courses. However, I expect each of you to come to class with empathy, an open mind, and the recognition that you have an ethical responsibility to those with whom you share our classroom space. If for any reason, you feel that the class is not providing you with the environment you need, please e-mail me or come see me immediately.

This course directly addresses many common individual and societal traumas, including war, colonialism, sexual trauma and rape, and racism. If you have been personally affected by any of these experiences, you may find this material difficult. I am happy to talk about your reaction to course materials at any time. If you need to leave the class at any time because of your reaction to course materials, or wish to stay away for a particular class, please let me know. Take whatever time you need and talk to others, or me, if you think it will be helpful. Mental health resources are also available if needed (see below).

Other Course Policies

This course is all about discussion and **participation**. If you miss classes without notifying me or are silent in class, this grade will be affected. If you cannot attend class for a degree-related or medical reason, please let me know in advance. Please come to each class having carefully considered the material listed in the syllabus and with plenty of critical perspectives to share with your colleagues. I encourage lively debate in class, so a wide variety of viewpoints will be very well received. I am always glad to hear opinions that differ from my own.

Class schedule

Week 1 - September 4: Theories of Trauma

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016 (2nd. ed.), 1-10.

Wirtz, Ursula. *Trauma and Beyond: The Mystery of Transformation*. New Orleans: Spring Journal, Inc, 2014, 57-64.

Herman, Judith. "Introduction" and "A Forgotten History," in *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 1-32.

Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," and Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, Piotr Sztompka, 1-59. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Week 2 - September 11: Theories of Resilience and Post-Traumatic Growth

Wirtz, Ursula. *Trauma and Beyond: The Mystery of Transformation*. New Orleans: Spring Journal, Inc, 2014, 75-102.

Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. New York: Routledge, 2008, 209-14.

Harms, Louise. *Understanding Trauma and Resilience*. London: Macmillan, 2015, 4-27.

Hernández-Wolfe, Pilar. *A Borderlands View on Latinos, Latin Americans and Decolonization: Rethinking Mental Health*. Jason Aronson, Plymouth, UK: 2013, 63-81.

Week 3 - September 18: Cultural Trauma and Music

Cizmic, Maria. *Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 3-66.

Schwartz, Jessica A. "Vocal Ability and Musical Performances of Nuclear Damages in the Marshall Islands." In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil Lerner, and Joseph Straus. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Hung, Eric. "Reflections of a Public Musicologist During the Current Wave of Anti-Asian Discrimination." *Colloquy: Music, Sound, and Trauma*, edited by Maria Cizmic and Jillian C. Rogers. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol. 77/2 (2024): 550-56.

Week 4 - September 25: Trauma and Music Pedagogy

Deborah Bradley and Juliet Hess, "Introduction" (16 pages) and Deborah Bradley, "When Music Haunts Memory" (15 pages). In *Trauma and Resilience in Music Education*, edited by Deborah Bradley and Juliet Hess. New York: Routledge, 2021.

Renihan, Colleen, John Spilker, and Trudi Wight. "Introduction: Radical Care." In *Sound Pedagogy: Radical Care in Music*, edited by Colleen Renihan, John Spilker, and Trudi Wight. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024.

Rogers, Jill. "On the Emotional and Social Significance of Teaching Music History in Relation to Trauma Studies." Unpublished paper, AMS National Meeting, 9 November 2017. Wek

Week 5 - October 2: Musical Resilience

James, Robin. *Resilience and Melancholy: Pop Music, Feminism, Neoliberalism*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2015, 125-64.

Cheng, William. "Black Noise, White Ears: Resilience, Rap, and the Killing of Jordan Davis." *Current Musicology* 102 (Spring 2018): 115-64.

October 6: Short Essay due – submit through Brightspace

Week 6 - October 9: Decolonizing Trauma Studies in Music

Martín-Baró, Ignacio. Translated by Adrienne Aron. "The Role of the Psychologist." In *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, edited by Adrienne Aron and Shawn Corne. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. tr 33-46.

Ansari, Emily Abrams and Giada Ferrucci. "Faith, Trauma, Resistance, and Resilience in the Revolutionary Songs of Civil War El Salvador," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol. 78, no. 1 (Spring 2025): 53-91.

Sheffield, Carrie Louise. "Native American Hip-Hop and Historical Trauma: Surviving and Healing Trauma on the 'Rez,'" *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 94-110.

Week 7 - October 16: Female and Queer Trauma

Meinhart, Michelle. "Contractions, Cries, and COVID: The Traumatic Soundscapes of UK Lockdown Hospital Maternity Wards." *Women & Music* 26/1 (2022): 148-169.

Greene, Kathanne. "Women Singer-Songwriters as Exemplary Actors: The Music of Rape and Domestic Violence." *Music and Politics* 11/2 (Summer 2017).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0011.205>.

Greitzer, Mary Lee. "Queer Responses to Sexual Trauma: The Voices of Tori Amos's 'Me and a Gun' and Lydia Lunch's *Daddy Dearest*." *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 17/1 (2013): 1-26.

Week 8 - October 23: The Politics of Traumatic Memory

Sprigge, Martha. "Dresden's Musical Ruins," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 144, no. 114 (2019): 83-121.

Keyes, Beth. "'The Absurd Disordering of Notes': Dysfunctional Memory in the Post-Traumatic Music of Ivor Gurney." In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil Lerner, and Joseph Straus. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Wlodarski, Amy Lynn. "Afterword." *George Rochberg: American Composer*. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2021). 148-62.

Week 9 - October 30: Music and Memorialization

Blim, Dan. "‘Meaningful Adjacencies’: Disunity and the Commemoration of 9/11 in John Adams’ ‘On the Transmigration of Souls.’" *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 11/2013 (7/4): 382-420.

Wlodarski, Amy Lynn. *Music Witness and Holocaust Representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University 2015, 1-10; 126-175.

Noriko Manabe, "Music Commemorating the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombings," in Fauser, Annegret, editor.; Figueroa, Michael A. *Performing Commemoration: Musical Reenactment and the Politics of Trauma*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020. 80-109.

November 3 to November 7: Fall Study Break – No Class, November 6

November 10: Final project proposal due through Brightspace.

Week 10 - November 13: Auditory Trauma and Weaponized Sound

Daughtry, Martin. *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 76-102.

Hirsch, Lily. *Music in American Crime Prevention and Punishment*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012, 110-38.

Cusick, Suzanne G. "‘You are in a Place that is Out of This World...’: Music in the Detention Camps of the ‘Global War on Terror.’" *Journal of the Society for American Music* vol. 2, no. 1 (2008), 1-26.

Week 11 - November 20: Intervention and Healing: Applied Ethnomusicology

Haskell, Erica. "The Role of Applied Ethnomusicology in Post-Conflict and Post-Catastrophe Communities." Pilzer, Joshua D. "The Study of Survivors’ Music." All in *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*, ed. Svanibor Pettan and Jeff Todd Titon. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Politz, Sarah. "Introduction." In *Transforming Vòdún: Musical Change and Postcolonial Healing in Benin’s Jazz and Brass Band Music*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023.

Castelo-Branco, Salwa El-Shawan. "Epilogue: Ethnomusicologists as Advocates," In *Music and Conflict*, ed. John O’Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, 243-52. Urbana: University of Illinois, Press, 2010.

Weeks 12 and 13 - November 27 and December 4: Presentations of final Projects

December 11 – individual project paper due. Submit through Brightspace.