



MUSIC 9727
MUSIC AND THE ENVIRONMENT
FALL 2025

Instructor: Dr. Kevin Mooney
Office hours: By appointment

Email: kmooney@uwo.ca
Class: Mondays 9:30–12:30, TC 340

Course Description

The first published reference to ‘ecomusicology’ was in 1972 and signalled a broadening of music research to include environmental sounds. The work of R. Murray Schafer and the World Soundscape Project is associated with this early period. Soundscape studies continues today, but “music and nature” topics have diversified and now attract researchers from across the music disciplines. The first international ecomusicology conference was held in 2012. This marked the arrival of an intensified engagement with music and nature, informed by decades of climate science, ecocriticism, sound studies, and research in the social sciences and humanities. In contrast to the early focus on environmental sounds, ecomusicology today considers sound, music, nature, and culture through the inescapable lens of environmental crisis.

The environment is everyone’s concern, which is reflected in the range of topics this course will address. We’ll start at the beginning with acoustic ecology and the environmental movement of the 1960s. Along the way, we will discuss aesthetic questions (sound versus music), philosophical questions (nature versus culture), sociological questions (the function of music), and ethical questions (the sustainability of music). We will consider these things in connection with Björk, John Cage, John Luther Adams, Glenn Gould, Tanya Tagaq, Beethoven, music for Tibetan singing bowls, soundscapes you create, and the playlist of the Voyager 1 spacecraft, which at this moment is 25,108,640,095 billion kilometers ([and counting](#)) away from the Earth.

Course Materials, Timeline and Format

This is an in-person graduate seminar organized topically according to the schedule on pages 5–6 below. Course readings and other materials will be provided by the instructor.

Method of Evaluation

Assigned readings, class participation, a soundscape project, paper proposal and bibliography, and final paper form the basis of evaluation, as described below:

- Participation (20%)
- Soundscape (20%)
- Proposal and bibliography (10%)
- Final paper (50%)

Participation

I expect you to come to class prepared to make informed contributions. You should be ready to respond to discussion questions distributed in advance. If you miss more than one class without prior approval, you will forfeit this portion of your grade.

Soundscape (4 minutes and 33 seconds + 3-5-page paper)

When asked about his composition *4'33"* (1952), John Cage said that he “hoped to have led other people to feel that the sounds of their environment constitute a music which is more interesting than the music which they would hear if they went into a concert hall.” You will create a soundscape, *4'33"* in duration, that frames environmental sounds in a place of your choosing. You will write a short paper reflecting on the relation of these sounds to their environment, what they signify, the human entanglements they evoke. Due Oct. 13–17.

Proposal and bibliography

Submit a final paper proposal to me by email by Oct. 27–31. This should include a brief (1-page) overview of your planned project and a provisional bibliography (5–10 sources).

Final Paper (4000–6000 words)

Your final paper, 10–15 pages in length (excluding bibliography), should be submitted by email as a properly formatted Word document by midnight, December 9.

Graduate Course Learning Objectives

Students will gain an understanding of scholarship relating music to the physical environment.
Students will learn to interpret relevant texts and formulate viewpoints on environmental themes.
Students will be able to describe sounds and music from an ecomusicological perspective.
Students will learn how concepts or models from other fields can inform the study of music.
Students will learn to communicate relationships between music, culture, and the environment.
Students will develop research skills to explore cross-disciplinary relationships.

Enrolment Restrictions

Enrolment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Don Wright Faculty of 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 web site: 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)

Students **may** use generative AI tools such as ChatGPT to ideate or ask research questions, to create an essay outline, to edit or receive feedback on self-authored work for the purposes of revision.

Students **may not** use generative AI to produce the final submission of written assignments. Content produced by generative AI and incorporated into your work must be cited appropriately (see [HERE](#)). You should keep a log of any AI-produced content and be prepared to disclose this upon request.

Finally, remember that AI results can be biased, inaccurate, or invented (“hallucinations”). You are responsible for any AI-assisted work you submit. Avoid sharing copyrighted material, personal information, and Western institutional data with AI tools.

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Western University is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Chonnonton Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

READINGS

Class 1 (9/8): Setting the -cene

- Allen, Aaron S, Rebecca Dirksen, Tyler Kinnear, Mark Pedelty, and Chiao-Wen Chiang. "Ecomusicology: Tributaries and Distributaries of an Integrative Field." *Music Research Annual* 3 (2022): 1–36.
- Crutzen, Paul J. "Geology of Mankind." *Nature* 415, no. 6867 (2002): 23. ↻
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. "A Vast Experiment: The Climate Crisis from A to Z." *The New Yorker*, November 28, 2022, 33–47.
- Titon, Jeff Todd. "The Nature of Ecomusicology." *Música e Cultura* 8, no. 1 (2013): 8–18.
- Zhong, Raymond. "For Planet Earth, This Might Be the Start of a New Age." *The New York Times*, December 17, 2022.

Class 2 (9/15): Soundscape – Hydroscape

- LaPensée, Elizabeth. "Singing as Gameplay for Healing in Honour Water." *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2016): 4–5.
- Nelson, Melissa K. "Rivers of Memory, Lakes of Survival: Indigenous Water Traditions and the Anishinaabeg Nation." In *Deep Blue: Critical Reflections on Nature, Religion and Water*, edited by Sylvia Shaw and Andrew Francis, 67–85. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Robinson, Dylan. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
- Schafer, R. Murray. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994.
- Stevens, Nicholas. "Review of John Luther Adams, *Become Ocean*. Cantaloupe Music B00L5VZL4S, 2014, CD and DVD." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 11, no. 3 (2017): 382–84.
- Wrightson, Kendall. "An Introduction to Acoustic Ecology." *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* 1, no. 1 (2000): 10–13.

Class 3 (9/22): Gaia

- Latour, Bruno. *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017.
- Lovelock, James. *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Rehding, Alexander. "Ecomusicology between Apocalypse and Nostalgia." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (2011): 409–14.
- Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Class 4 (9/29): Silence/Noise

- Gann, Kyle. *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Schuster, Joshua. *The Ecology of Modernism: American Environments and Avant-Garde Poetics*. Modern and Contemporary Poetics. Tuscaloosa: The University Alabama Press, 2015.

Class 5 (10/6): Deep Time

- Armitstead, Claire. "Only 980 Years to Go! Parties and Fears as 1,000-Year-Long Piece of Music Turns 20." *The Guardian*, September 22, 2020.
- Neugebauer, Rainer O. *The John Cage Organ Project & the Climate Change*, 2021.
- Rehding, Alexander. "Music and the Anthropocene: Taking the Long View." Public lecture given at the American Academy in Berlin, October 19, 2022.
- . "Longplayers." *AMS – Musicology Now* (blog), December 14, 2015.

Thanksgiving (10/13): No class

Class 6 (10/20): Ideas of North

- Adams, John Luther. *Silences so Deep: Music, Solitude, Alaska*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020.
- Adams, John Luther. "Music in the Anthropocene." *Slate*, February 24, 2015.
- Davidson, Peter. *The Idea of North*. London, UK: Reaktion, 2005.
- Gould, Glenn, and Tim Page. *The Glenn Gould Reader*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1989.
- Gould, Glenn. *The Idea of North* (1967).
- Ross, Alex. "Song of the Earth." In *The Farthest Place: The Music of John Luther Adams*, edited by Bernd Herzogenrath, 13–22. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2012.

Class 7 (10/27): Posthuman/Planetary

- Galloway, Kate. "The Aurality of Pipeline Politics and Listening for Nacreous Clouds: Voicing Indigenous Ecological Knowledge in Tanya Tagaq's *Animism* and *Retribution*." *Popular Music* 39, no. 1 (2020): 121–44.
- Gremaud, Ann-Sofie N. "From within the Porous Body: Modes of Engagement in Björk's *Biophilia* Album." In *Artistic Visions of the Anthropocene North: Climate Change and Nature in Art*, edited by Gry Hedin and Ann-Sofie N. Gremaud, 128–53. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

Reading Week (11/3): No class

Class 8 (11/10): Sustainability

- Allen, Aaron S. "Fatto di Fiemme?: Stradivari's Violins and the Musical Trees of the Paneveggio." In *Invaluable Trees: Cultures of Nature, 1660-1830*, edited by Laura Auricchio, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook and Giulia Pacini, 301–15. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012.
- Dawe, Kevin. "Materials Matter: Towards a Political Ecology of Musical Instrument Making." In *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature*, edited by Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe, 109–21. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Sinapi, Christine. "Producing String Quartets." In *Music and the Performing Arts in the Anthropocene: Nature, Materialities and Ecological Transformation*, edited by François Ribac, Isabelle Moindrot, and Nicolas Donin, 167–76. London, UK: Routledge, 2025.

Class 9 (11/17): Dematerialization

- Chayka, Kyle. *The Longing for Less: Living with Minimalism*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020.
- Devine, Kyle. *Decomposed: The Political Ecology of Music*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019.

Class 10 (11/24): Action

- Morton, Timothy. *Being Ecological*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018.
- Allen, Aaron S. "Greening the Curriculum: Beyond a Short Music History in Ecomusicology." *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 8, no. 1 (2017): 91–109.

Class 11 (12/1): A Postmortem Playlist

- Chua, Daniel K. L., and Alexander Rehding. *Alien Listening: Voyager's Golden Record and Music from Earth*. New York: Zone Books, 2021.
- Hart, Heidi. *Music and the Environment in Dystopian Narrative: Sounding the Disaster*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, *Voyager* website,
<http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/spacecraft/goldenrec.html>

Class 12 (12/8): Wrap-up