

MUS 541, Topics in the Cross-Cultural Study of Music – Theories of Musical Circulation

Instructor: Benjamin Tausig | Monday, 2pm – 4:40pm

Musical instruments, compositions, ethics, performative ideals, artifacts, audiences, and concepts are notoriously peripatetic, rarely confined to any one place or community for long. Almost as a rule, music is made and experienced in transit, crossing all kinds of barriers in the process. The field of music studies has been by turns anxious and enthralled by this tendency for its primary object to travel so readily. Such mobility confounds stable definitions, even as it also generates seemingly endless recombinations and creative misuses, which bear discussion. An exciting variety of theories have emerged to explain how and why music travels, and what happens when it does. Scholars have offered metaphors from liquid behavior and from electrical circuitry, have drawn on cultural geography and diaspora studies, and have presented case studies from across the world. The resulting conversation relates to discussions of coloniality, capital, and aesthetics, and this course will engage each of these.

Coursework includes weekly readings and Brightspace postings, a brief midterm paper, thematic assignments, and a final paper (with formal presentation).

This course is primarily intended for MA and PhD students, and it fulfills the Elective Group 1 requirement for students in the MA or PhD Critical Studies track. With the permission of the instructor, interested MM or DMA students may enroll in the course, which fulfills the Elective Group 1 requirement.

3 credits