This course examines the role of music theory and musical performance in the formation of community, actual and utopic. We will begin our study with the musical, mathematical, and mystical thought of Pythagoras and his followers in the short-lived utopian community of Croton: How is "the Music of the Spheres" a paradigm both for ethical action within the community and for the progress of the soul within the cosmos? From Croton, we will turn to debates about music and civic culture in fifth-century democratic Athens: What forms of music and poetry sustain and subvert citizens and states? Is there a particularly “democratic” form of music? (Readings from Aeschylus, Euripides, and Plato). From ancient Greece, we will then turn to the late-nineteenth century efforts of Wagner, partially inspired by Athenian tragedy, to create the “Total Work of Art” in his four-part music drama Der Ring des Nibelungen and in the festival at Bayreuth; we will also read responses to Wagner from Nietzsche, Thomas Mann, and Theodor Adorno. Finally, we will consider some twentieth-century experiments in music and art, especially those associated with Fluxus (e.g., John Cage, La Monte Young, Morton Feldman, Steve Reich, Terry Riley), in dialogue with our earlier readings.

Schedule of Readings

I. Introduction, by way of The Birth of Tragedy

Mon. Jan. 25: Course Introduction, and an introduction to Nietzsche
Weds. Jan. 27: Nietzsche Birth of Tragedy, sections 1-10
Mon. Feb. 1: Nietzsche Birth of Tragedy, sections 11-18

II. Pythagoras at Croton

Weds. Feb. 3: Iamblichus Life of Pythagoras 1-15
Mon. Feb. 8: Iamblichus Life of Pythagoras 16-36, and a dossier of musical and mathematical materials
Weds. Feb. 10: Plato Timaeus
Mon. Feb. 15: Presidents’ Day
Weds. Feb. 17: Plato Timaeus

III. Athens and the “New Music”

Mon. Feb. 22: Aeschylus Seven Against Thebes
Weds. Feb. 24: Euripides Bacchae
Mon. Feb. 29: Euripides Bacchae, and J. Z. Smith “The Devil in Mr. Jones”
Weds. March 2: Aristophanes Frogs
Mon. March 7: Plato Republic 2-3
Weds. March 9: Republic 6.505a-7.535a and Republic 10

Spring Break!

IV. Wagner and Bayreuth

Mon. March 21: Wagner Der Ring des Nibelungen: Das Rheingold
Mon. March 28: Wagner Der Ring des Nibelungen: Die Walküre

Mon. April 4: Wagner *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Siegfried*

Weds. April 6: Wagner *Siegfried*; Thomas Mann *The Blood of the Walsungs* and “The Sorrows and Grandeur of Richard Wagner”

Mon. April 11: Wagner *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Götterdämmerung*

Weds. April 13: Wagner *Götterdämmerung*; Adorno, selections from *In Search of Wagner*; Zizek, “Why is Wagner Worth Saving?”

V. Fluxus (and related others) in NYC

Mon. April 18: Performance of John Cage *4’33"* (1952) (location tba)


Mon. April 25: Class trip (!) to La Monte Young’s Dream House

Weds. April 27: Dossier of materials related to the Dream House and to Fluxus; Velvet Underground *White Light/White Heat*

Mon. May 2: Morton Feldman Rothko Chapel (1971) and “A Life Without Bach and Beethoven,” “After Modernism,” and “Rothko Chapel”


Mon. May 9: Terry Riley *In C* (1964), and a class wrap-up

Books (Nietzsche, Euripides, Plato, and the Wagner libretti) are available at the NYU bookstore; all other readings and recordings will be available thru NYU Classes.

Class Requirements:

1. Three essays of 5-7 pp. each or one essay of 5-7 pp. and one more substantial essay or final project. Essay #1, which is required of all, will be assigned on Weds. Feb. 10 and is due on Feb. 21. Following Spring Break, each student can then decide if s/he prefers to write two more 5-7 pp. essays (due April 24 and May 17) or one fuller paper or project, which can be on a topic of your own choice (though you should come talk to me about that topic—just so that there are no surprises). Whether you choose the two- or the three-paper option, you must write about Wagner—either as the principal topic of a paper, or in comparison or dialogue with another of our works. I’m also open to the possibility of creative projects for the final paper (again, come to office hours to discuss). This work will account for roughly 75% of your final grade.

2. Class participation: Starting with the week of Mon. Feb. 1 and for each of the following weeks, you should submit a paragraph or so to the Classes-based class discussion forum before one of our two class sessions (your choice): your paragraph could simply be two or three questions for class discussion, a response to something in particular that you read or heard, a rant of pleasure or pain, or ... If you’re submitting your paragraph for Monday’s class, please do so by 10 am on Monday; if for Wednesday’s class, by 10 pm on Tuesday. Please take a look at (and respond to) your classmates’ paragraphs before class; I hope that we can use these various questions and responses to ground our class discussion. Your contributions to class (the posts and in-class participation in discussion) will account for roughly 25% of your grade. Weekly Questions cannot be made up. Unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade.

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise
the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.