

# GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

Course: PHIL 495: Aesthetics, Music and the Brain  
3 Credits  
Instructor: Professor McClelland



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M. T. Th. 2:15-3:15 p.m.

To the best of our current knowledge, human beings are the only fully musical species on the planet. No other type of animal engages in the range and variety of musical practices that we do. Moreover, music is universal to our species, being found in similar kinds and varieties in all human cultures. The oldest known human implement more sophisticated than a knife blade or axe is a bone flute estimated to be more than 30,000 years old. We use music in many ways, to coordinate the bodily movements of large numbers of people, for entertainment, accompaniment for song or dance, as part of rituals both religious and secular, and so on. Much of our response to music appears to be genetically determined. This course inquires into the biological and psychological basis for our appreciation of music, and seeks to develop a biologically realistic explanation for those practices, including consideration of various answers to the question “how is music adaptive for our species?” A further central question will be: “How do we judge music to be good?”

## Required texts:

- David Huron, *Sweet anticipation: music and the psychology of expectation* (MIT Press, 2007). ISBN: 9780262582780. The course is centered in a close reading of this text.
- There will be additional readings, copies of which will be posted to the Blackboard website for this course. Many of these readings will be drawn from scientific publications.

## Course requirements:

1. No musical expertise or knowledge of musical theory is required for this course. Only the capacity to read carefully and critically, and to reflect on your own experience.
2. Regular attendance at all scheduled class meetings is presumed. It is not my practice to take roll, but your absence will be noted, especially if it is repeated. Illness and other genuine emergencies are excepted, of course.
3. I will assign short writing assignments (one page or less) at least once a week, the problems and puzzles to be solved in these assignments being drawn from the readings and our discussions of them. Your average score on these assignments will constitute 70% of your final grade in the course.
4. The course presumes a high degree of engagement with the readings and with one another in discussion. The remaining 30% of your final grade in the course will be an assessment of your participation in the course.

5. I do not have an office available, and thus cannot hold regular office hours. However, I am available outside of regular class meetings for consultation on an *ad hoc* basis. If you arrange to meet me for that purpose and are unable to keep the appointment, please send me an email message to that effect. Failure to do so will result in my refusal to make future appointments with you.
6. My email address is: [mccllland@gem.gonzaga.edu](mailto:mccllland@gem.gonzaga.edu).
7. Use of electronic equipment in the classroom is prohibited. This includes iPods, cell-phones, laptop computers, calculators and the like. Exceptions can be made for anyone with a certified disability and who needs to use a laptop or other electronic equipment for note-taking or the like.
8. All other ordinary policies of the University, including the Academic Honesty Policy, are hereby presumed.