

Fall 2011 music history course offering

M510: PROCESS MUSIC

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1 – 2:15

Prof. Phil Ford



This course deals with the postwar avant garde and focuses on process music—pieces that specify (often through written instructions) an action or process to be carried out by humans or machines, with or without an audience. While John Cage’s 4’33” is the model for many such pieces, process music can include such various things as La Monte Young’s drone music, Steve Reich’s early tape pieces, R. Murray Schafer’s environmental works, Fluxus event scores, theatrical Happenings, and various other kinds of improvisational and open-form composition. This course will involve both historical study and performance of this music; each class session will demand that students both discuss assigned music/readings and play some of the pieces under discussion. Graded work will consist entirely of written essays and reports.

The idea of understanding the world in terms of process, and of artistic creation as the business of orchestrating and controlling process, was one of the most important themes within avant-garde and countercultural artworlds in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Consequently, while this class focuses on music, it will also involve the study of theater, dance, film, painting, and sculpture. Assigned readings will include both primary and secondary sources—pieces written by the artists themselves, the era’s leading thinkers, and more recent scholars.

Please email questions to fordp@indiana.edu