

# The Case for Performance Studies in Undergraduate Music History Teaching<sup>1</sup>

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When I announce to conservatory colleagues that I teach an “Introduction to Performance Studies” class, they often suppose it has something to do with historical performance practices of standard Western Classical repertoire. When I explain that this course has more to do with critical theories of performance both onstage and off, I am faced with consternation. Teaching at a conservatory means that acquisition of practical career-related skills and knowledge (be it music or dance performance, music therapy or education) leaves less time for the development of critical thinking—the demand for technically perfect and polished performances sits in uneasy tension with the messier process of learning to analyze and theorize the relationships between aesthetics, society, cultural production, and identity. Yet this doesn’t have to be the case. As I have discovered in teaching an Introduction to Performance Studies class for undergraduate music majors, performance can be an inroad into critical analysis and theory that is often reserved for graduate humanities courses. The present article makes a case for incorporating performance studies into undergraduate music education; with flexible subject matter and broad applicability, a performance studies class can complement a more traditional or experimental music curriculum. Moreover, feedback from students suggests that the topics and analytic skills presented in the course were widely applicable to various music concentrations.

Much of what draws students to music is the experience of performance, either as audience members, performers, or both. Whether singing along in the car, playing from memory on stage, or critiquing music videos with friends, students who engage with music often take the performative act as the main event. In their experience, the “music itself” is not separated from the people engaging with it or the socio-cultural space in which it takes place. Music

1. I would like to thank the editors, reviewers, and those who provided feedback on the content of this article, especially Naomi Graber, Douglas Shadle, Kira Thurman, Alanna Tierno, Alexander Stefaniak, Anne Rebull, and Aimee Slaughter—as well as those who shared forthcoming work with me, including Joshua Neumann and David VanderHamm.

majors certainly intuit this connection, as do non-majors, yet the kind of Western music performance traditionally taught in music departments is often limited to the technical and expressive production of sound. In what classes are students challenged to consider and reevaluate their own assumptions about the nature of performance, particularly embodied performance, in its broadest sense? How can students learn to analyze not only conventions of stylized, aesthetic performances on stage, but also everyday social performances of collective and individual identity? How may artistic, aesthetic performances and socio-cultural performances of the self intersect?

The undergraduate performance studies class I designed was born of these concerns, as well as my own scholarly interest in the field. By the end of the semester, students in the class defined performance studies as “the scholarly study of how and what we perform,” including “performativity,” and “scripted and non-scripted performances.” This answer is not far from Richard Schechner’s rather broad definition of performance studies as a way to “experience life from the perspective of performance. . . . to investigate and understand the world in its ceaseless becoming.”<sup>2</sup> Analyzing “from the perspective of performance” often involves examining how meaning is created through gestural, physical, and vocal acts—elements that may be overlooked in traditional text-based histories—whether in staged performances or everyday life. The field has developed with contributions from theater, dance, anthropology, linguistics, gender and queer studies, and race theory; it can address almost any topic, as Schechner acknowledges, from white male abortion protesters to the racial implications of posing in front of museum exhibitions.<sup>3</sup>

Although performance studies resists delineation as a discipline—leading Joseph Roach to dub it an “antidiscipline”—it often deals with questions of embodiment, constructions and performances of identity, and the intersections of staged performance and everyday social performance.<sup>4</sup> Typical analytic lenses employed in performance studies include the concept of ritual, the notion of performativity, and the idea of embodiment as an essential element of the human condition. An orientation toward performance studies in a music history classroom could help students learn to recognize and analyze the ritualistic nature of certain performance traditions, take into account the roles of music audiences and consumers, analyze how different kinds of performance interact, and identify the contributions of different performances in culture.

2. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), ix.

3. See Peggy Phelan, “White Men and Pregnancy: Discovering the Body to be Rescued,” in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 130–45; and Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things,” *Social Text* 101 27, no. 4 (2009): 67–94.

4. Joseph Roach (1994), cited in Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 206.

Ultimately, this approach may help students appreciate how observational analysis and critical thinking can also be applied outside the classroom.

Recently “the undergraduate music history curriculum” has come under pedagogical scrutiny in a number of ways as musicologists reconsider what and how we want our students to learn. To many readers, “the undergraduate music history curriculum” may suggest a focus on Western art music and bring to mind classes that focus on one or two of the traditional music-historical periods. If such subjects are required and others are elective, it may reinforce the vestiges of Western Europe colonialist values, as Alejandro L. Madrid has argued of the canon.<sup>5</sup> Some schools have undertaken to remedy this bias by allowing students more control over their chosen paths within the major. Harvard recently has done away with its theory requirement for undergraduate music majors to allow for more curricular flexibility and to lessen emphasis on the theoretical traditions of Western art music.<sup>6</sup> At Vanderbilt University, the music history curriculum eschews traditional chronological teaching of Western music history to focus rather on skill-acquisition; as Melanie Lowe describes, some classes are structured according to themes that cut across music-historical eras.<sup>7</sup> As individual programs are beginning to experiment with the structures, requirements, and outcomes of music concentrations, curricula are becoming more pluralistic and varied. I suggest that we recognize this diversity of curricula in our own discourse on music history teaching by retiring the phrase “the undergraduate music history curriculum” and the monolith it implies.

In the present article I would like to focus on teaching undergraduate Western art music history. Many of the issues relating to a performance-studies based approach are often addressed in ethnomusicological curricula and scholarship, due in part to the field’s anthropological methodologies, its focus on music as cultural practice, and the decentering or complete lack of the work concept in many areas. In contrast, incredibly, the Routledge revised edition of *Musicology: The Key Concepts* does not list “performance” as a key concept.<sup>8</sup> In a roundtable on the state and future of Western art music history pedagogy, Douglass Seaton notes that “[w]hen our music history courses take on issues of music in history, we try to get students to discuss the meanings of works or repertoires in relation to issues of gender, social structures, cultural values, or

5. Alejandro L. Madrid, “Diversity, Tokenism, Non-Canonic Music,” this *Journal* 7 (2016), 125.

6. Valia P. Leifer, “Music Department to Adopt New Curriculum Beginning Fall 2017,” *The Harvard Crimson*, 22 March 2017, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2017/3/22/music-concentration-changes/>

7. See Melanie Lowe, “Rethinking the Undergraduate Music History Sequence in the Information Age,” this *Journal* 5 (2015): 65–71.

8. David Beard and Kenneth Gloag, *Musicology: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

the philosophy of their contemporary environments.”<sup>9</sup> The dichotomy articulated above—work/context—is one that musicologists have worked to interrogate and reframe since the inception of the field, from early attempts to define *Musikwissenschaft*, to the New Musicological struggle to free music studies from positivist and formalist analysis, and further, to the more recent efforts to locate the body as a site of musicological inquiry.<sup>10</sup> If the trend is indeed to incorporate more bodily experience into our perspectives, then performance studies can offer suitable methodological tools while helping us move beyond the work/context dichotomy when teaching.

In particular, the embodied nature of performance and questions of identity concern musicologists and are increasingly reflected in changing curricula. In traditional pedagogy, however, embodiment as a teaching principle may be eschewed in preference for critical thinking—“the work of the mind”—creating a false Cartesian dichotomy that may still govern students’ own conceptions of themselves. In typical classroom settings where students are seated and listening or talking, they may not be aware of how embodiment plays a role in their learning and lives.

One new goal might be to help students consider how societal values are inscribed in the body—how they function in the construction of the body as such—not in a theoretical sense but rather physically, in their own bodies and in those of their classmates. Music majors who sing or play instruments explore bodily training and construction through their art, but they may nonetheless subconsciously maintain what Judith Hamera articulates as a “split between bodily experience and conceptual life.”<sup>11</sup> Students may be challenged to consider the bodily discipline of learning proper technique, a point of intersection with disability studies, where constructions of bodily otherness are a main focus

9. Douglass Seaton, “Reconsidering Undergraduate Music History,” this *Journal* 5 (2015), 54.

10. See Kevin C. Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Ruth Solie, ed., *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Thomas C. Gary, ed., *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Bruce W. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Elisabeth Le Guin, *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Mary Simonson, *Body Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

11. Judith Hamera, “Performance Studies, Pedagogy, and Bodies in/as the Classroom,” in *Teaching Performance Studies*, ed. Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 22.

of the discourse.<sup>12</sup> For example, one might ask students how a set of inscribed technical practices forces the body into a narrow way of “performing” music.

Similarly, a turn to performance studies may entail less emphasis on traditional pedagogical concerns in a Western music history class—particularly musical formalism, which still is reified in numerous score anthologies and music history textbooks. Although it may be a truism for musicologists today to suggest that “the work does not exist,” music majors may nonetheless struggle with this concept, especially as paper museums of scores (or digital museums such as IMSLP) continue to function as revered guidelines for their practice. I am not suggesting that we throw out the scores with the bath water, but rather that we help students consider how musical notation also inscribes bodily practice. What gestures are encoded in musical scores? How did musicians, audiences, and consumers interact with scores historically? How might we understand the relationship between more constant, scripted (notated, texted) elements of performance and more variable, performative aspects?<sup>13</sup> An orientation to performance can encourage students to question their own relationship with “the work” and to consider the ritualistic nature of concert performance as well as the ongoing debates over how to control bodies during classical concerts today.<sup>14</sup> More generally, it can shift the focus of our pedagogical efforts from

12. See Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Helen Polson, “The Dance is in Your Body and Not in Your Crutches’: Technique, Technology, and Agency in Disability Movement Performance” (PhD diss., New York University, 2013); and David VanderHamm, “Virtuosity, Disability, and the Limits of Logic,” in “The Social Construction of Virtuosity: Musical Labor and the Valuation of Skill in the Age of Electronic Media” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2017), 71–109.

13. Performance-informed approaches encompass methodologies including semiotic, systemic-functional grammar: see Fabio Rossi and Maria Grazia Sindoni, “The Phantoms of the Opera: Toward a Multidimensional Interpretative Framework of Analysis,” in *Mapping Multimodal Performance Studies*, ed. Maria Grazia Sindoni, Janina Wildfeuer, and Kay L. O’Halloran (New York: Routledge, 2017): 61–84. For an empirical, recording-based approach to performance that analyzes nuances in temporal-textual interpretation, see Joshua Neumann, “Phenomena, Poiesis, and Performance Profiling: Temporal-Textual Emphasis and Creative Process Analysis in *Turandot* at the Metropolitan Opera,” *Empirical Musicology Review* (forthcoming).

14. The debate on classical concert etiquette, or the policing of spectator bodies, continues in various newspapers and blogs; this could easily be the subject of a class discussion. See, for example, Anne Midgette, “How (not) to Behave: Manners and the Classical Music Audience,” *Washington Post*, 29 April 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/how-not-to-behave-manners-and-the-classical-music-audience/2015/04/29/111a2aa4-bc72-11e4-b274-e5209a3bc9a9\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/how-not-to-behave-manners-and-the-classical-music-audience/2015/04/29/111a2aa4-bc72-11e4-b274-e5209a3bc9a9_story.html); Gilbert Ngabo, “Police Notified after Academic Reports She was Assaulted at Symphony,” *Toronto Star*, 22 June 2017, <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/06/22/police-notified-after-academic-reports-she-was-assaulted-at-symphony.html>; and Francis Wilson, “Come to the Concert, But for Goodness Sake, Sit Still!” *The Cross-Eyed Pianist* (blog), 23 August 2017, [https://crosseyedpianist.com/tag/classical-concerts\\_](https://crosseyedpianist.com/tag/classical-concerts_)

ontological study of the “work” to the people and cultural practices that once created and continue to create meaning at the site of performance.

With an increased awareness of embodied practice, including their own, students may be better equipped to analyze the subtle everyday performances that contribute to the formation of identity. Erving Goffman’s foundational 1959 text, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, offers a good starting point, where face-to-face human interactions in Anglo-American culture are the focus of analysis. Goffman frames this analysis in terms of acting and dramaturgy, defining everyday performance as “the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.”<sup>15</sup> Such performances encompass chosen words and their delivery, facial expressions, and bodily movement: examples range from a cheating spouse hiding infidelity to a TV wrestler faking his aggression. Goffman implies that there is an underlying “reality” or “authenticity” to an everyday performer’s being, although he allows that the performer “can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality that he stages is the real reality.”<sup>16</sup> Sincerity aside, the performance is nonetheless conditioned by previous social interactions.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Goffman argues that “[a] status, a position, a social place is not a material thing to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated.”<sup>18</sup> Goffman’s clear language and numerous examples make this text one of the more accessible options for undergraduates.

Of course, the notion of social performance has been refined and challenged in subsequent decades, with particular reference to identity. More recent multimodal performance studies have also taken into account further details of performance, such as space, distance, duration, less kinetic behavioral processes (i.e., breathing, sitting, gazing), and differences between live events and various recorded performances.<sup>19</sup> Helping students consider how social ontologies and cultural meaning are created and challenged through performance need not be as complicated as some of the theoretical readings on the subject. Although I assigned an article by Judith Butler, there are many ways to engage students: one might ask students to recall a gesture that they feel is an embodiment particular to one gender or another, or a stereotypical representation of a heteronormative gender roles, etc. This kind of exercise may depend on class dynamics and the level of comfort established among the group.

15. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1959), 15.

16. Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self*, 16.

17. Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self*, 74.

18. Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self*, 75.

19. Sindoni, Wildfeuer, and O’Halloran, *Mapping Multimodal Performance Studies*, 7.

However, the very ubiquity of performance provides a way to train students in empathy, which is becoming increasingly necessary in an age of emboldened discrimination. Because each student will have some experience with performance in everyday life, this can offer a common starting point for navigating difference. Particularly given William Cheng's recent call for a more caring musicology, having students reflect on these differences and social constructions may open a window into understanding others' struggles and perspectives.<sup>20</sup> Group activities are also helpful in fostering a sense of community in the classroom, which has been proved to create motivation for students.<sup>21</sup> The Grotowski acting exercises we attempted, e.g., physically growing from seed into tree, worked in this way, as I saw students at first shyly, then more confidently take part. One student testified in an anonymous report that the performance studies class "has challenged me to step out of my comfort zone and do things that are actually completely embarrassing to me. Especially in times where we had to leave the class and go in the hallways and perform certain methods and such." Not all instructors may feel comfortable introducing these kinds of activities (nor were students required to participate), but in the case of my particular class, I found them useful in creating a sense of empathetic community.

Performance studies can be helpful in introducing certain issues that have increasingly occupied musicological research into the undergraduate classroom. Diversifying the canon, or at least the case studies taught in music history classes, is one of these concerns (which presumes a music history class organized around works and their characteristics). In a recent blog aiming to increase the diversity of figures studied in Western art music teaching, Kira Thurman and Kristen Turner note that a performance-aware approach broadens the scope of historical participants from dead composers.<sup>22</sup> Even in more traditional, chronologically organized courses, a framework that draws on performance studies can help overcome the problem of tokenism without downplaying the unique nature of certain case studies. For example, the black composer Joseph Boulogne Chevalier de Saint-Georges (ca. 1745–1799), as an expert fencer and virtuoso violinist, could provide a rich exploration of how performance, bodily ability, and race intersected in eighteenth-century Parisian

20. William Cheng, *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

21. See discussion in Susan A. Ambrose, Michael W. Bridges, Michele DiPietro, Marshal C. Lovett, and Marie K. Norman, *How Learning Works* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 79 and 170–87.

22. Kira Thurman and Kristen Turner, "Six Easy Ways to Immediately Address Racial and Gender Diversity in Your Music History Classroom," *Musicology Now* (blog), 17 July 2017, <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2017/07/>.

culture.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Camille Nickerson's performative recreations of black creole song as "The Louisiana Lady" draw attention to the role of performance in advocating for certain repertoire and creating music history.<sup>24</sup> Students learn to analyze relationships between various topics, as they might in an ethnomusicology class that juxtaposes case studies across geographic and cultural boundaries. As Mary Simonson has argued in *Body Knowledge*, an intermedial, performance-based lens works to reduce the problems of a traditional diachronic approach to Western music historiography.<sup>25</sup>

As for skill acquisition, a performance studies class encourages students to learn and practice close observational skills, interpretive skills (moving beyond dualistic thinking), argumentative skills, and performance skills, as well as body-awareness and empathy. Active learning is a popular pedagogical goal today, though it is often manifested in group-work settings or flipped classrooms, many of which remain discussion-based. In contrast, a performance-oriented approach can help students become more physically active in class. This setting would be perfect for a Reacting to the Past game; alternately, one could have a class happening, or try various acting exercises in conjunction with theories of theatrical performance.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, this strategy creates a constructivist learning environment, in which students help construct knowledge as they experience learning together.<sup>27</sup> I will describe more of the particulars below in my description of the performance studies class I taught.

The main objective of a performance studies class is to encourage critical thinking and analysis through the conceptual lens of performance, which may well entail a conceptual shift for the students. For music majors who are focused on practicing, this is an engaging introduction to the skills more associated with a liberal arts education. Practically, the course is another way to approach global questions of performance that teachers cannot always address in private

23. For more on this topic, see Gabriel Banat, *The Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Virtuoso of the Swords and the Bow* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2006); and E. F. Smidak, *Joseph Boulogne called Chevalier de Saint-Georges*, trans. John M. Mitchell (Lucerne: Avenir Foundation for Research of Human Society, 1996).

24. See Doris E. McGinty and Camille Nickerson, "The Louisiana Lady," *The Black Perspective in Music* 7 (1979): 81–94.

25. Mary Simonson, *Body Knowledge*, 2.

26. See Kevin R. Burke, "Roleplaying Music History: Honing General Education Skills via 'Reacting to the Past,'" this *Journal* 5, no.1 (Fall 2014), 1–21. For more on "Reacting to the Past," see Mark Carnes, *Minds on Fire: How Role-Immersion Games Transform College* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). More information is also available online at <https://reacting.barnard.edu/>.

27. See Catherine Twomey Fosnot, ed., *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005); and George W. Gagnon Jr. and Michelle Collay, *Designing for Learning: Six Elements in Constructivist Classrooms* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2001).



instruction, due to the close focus on technique and piece-specific concerns; for example, it challenges the assumption that performance takes place only on stage for a given duration of time, after which “real life” returns. It also forces students to consider how values and societal norms might be enforced or subverted in different kinds of performances. Non-performance majors may broaden their understanding of performance to an all-encompassing definition directly applicable to their schoolwork and life. Ultimately, students may reorient their thinking to consider how performance *creates* history and cultural memory. In this class the relationship between different kinds of performance, staged and social, becomes palpable, and students embrace critical thinking as they discover that conceptual frameworks may be applied beyond the classroom.

### **Crafting a Performance Studies Syllabus for Undergraduate Music Majors**

After a brief survey of syllabi for “Introduction to Performance Studies” courses, I gleaned that these courses are usually offered at the graduate level, outside of music departments. Moreover, these courses usually include theoretical readings that may be challenging for undergraduates. A quasi-canon of foundational texts in performance studies has emerged, including J. L. Austin, Erving Goffman, Richard Schechner, Joseph Roach, Victor Turner, Peggy Phelan, Judith Butler, Rebecca Schneider, and more.<sup>28</sup> These texts explore various aspects of performance as a major and indispensable aspect of culture, from theatrical, anthropological, linguistic, and other perspectives. I was concerned that beginning with this kind of scholarly theoretical literature would be overwhelming for undergraduates, who are more accustomed to textbooks.

Thus, two problems emerged in this planning stage: designing a course specifically tailored to undergraduate music majors and selecting readings that could be both thought-provoking and digestible. Although there is a textbook for this field, Schechner’s *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, I wanted students to have a sense of progressively discovering and constructing the field

28. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*; Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Seriousness of Human Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982); Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*; Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007). Performance studies anthologies include *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, ed. Richard Schechner (New York: Routledge, 2013); and *The Performance Studies Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, ed. Henry Bial (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

and an opportunity to grapple with original readings.<sup>29</sup> I therefore structured the class independently from any existing syllabus or textbook, with the intention of covering both performance as defined in aestheticized media domains (i.e., theater, music, dance) and societal and individual performance (as conceived by scholars concerned with identity and social ritual)—in short, with two major class units on “aesthetic performance” and “performativity.” Within these units, we covered a wide range of topics and engaged with a variety of writings, including translated first-hand documents dating to the early twentieth century as well as some of the more recent theoretical texts that appear on graduate syllabi. Other sources included live performances, theatrical acting exercises, less formal “class happenings,” filmed performances, and music videos ranging from 1930s Beijing opera to Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*.

Designing the course also offered me the opportunity to collaborate outside the music division of the conservatory, and I am grateful to my colleagues in the theater department, J. J. Ruscella and Carolyn Coulson, for lending their advice (and books). Throughout the semester, we had guests join the class for discussion, including three dance majors and two graduate students who shared their expertise on Chinese opera and Victor Turner’s concept of liminality respectively.<sup>30</sup> Guest voices broadened the scope of discussion, and in their chat with the conservatory dance majors on issues of performance and affect, my students discovered various points of intersection between the arts of music and movement.

Another appealing aspect of designing a performance studies class is the freedom to weight content toward areas of interest for students. My class of about thirty students was comprised of students with many different majors; by creating content that could appeal to this diverse group I could introduce my class to different modes of analysis.<sup>31</sup>

The structure and content reflected the two basic learning outcomes of the course:

1. to identify and describe trends in aestheticized performance in various arts;
2. to articulate and apply theories of performance to socio-cultural case studies.

29. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. The volume *Teaching Performance Studies* also includes useful pedagogical content, but seems to be designed with theater and anthropology departments in mind; see Stucky and Wimmer, *Teaching Performance Studies*.

30. I am grateful to (now Dr.) Anne Rebull and Heidi Jensen.

31. The students in my class were not all music performance majors; there were two composers as well as students from the areas of music education, music therapy, and music production and recording technology.

Within the two main units of performance and performativity, class was organized by weekly topics, meeting three times a week in fifty-minute sessions. Students usually had a theoretical reading over the weekend, which we discussed in class, then we analyzed examples of performances or visited variations on the weekly theme for the next two days. We began with what I considered to be the most accessible “origin” of performance studies: Western theories of acting and theater in the early twentieth century. As can be seen in my course outline (see **Table 1**), I decided to weight the course towards more traditional forms of aesthetic performance, given the population of conservatory music majors.

**Table 1:** Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction to Concepts

*Unit 1: Aesthetic Performance*

- Week 2: Theater Theories I (Stanislavsky, Brecht and Weill)
- Week 3: Theater Theories II (Artaud, Grotowski)
- Week 4: Music, Theater, Dance (Baroque opera and gesture, Wagner and *Gesamtkunstwerk*)
- Week 5: Theatrical Music Performance (Chinese opera, musical theater)
- Week 6: Evaluating Performance (Joseph Roach on “it,” humor/play theories)
- Week 7: Performance Art and Anti-Art (Dada, Surrealism revisiting Artaud and film, Yoko Ono and Marina Abramović)
- Week 8: (class happening, break/quiz)
- Week 9: Performance and Film (Reframing Screen Performance,<sup>32</sup> music videos)

*Unit 2: Performativity*

- Week 10: Speech Acts, Social Performance (J.L. Austin, Augusto Boal)
- Week 11: Ritual (Victor Turner)
- Week 12: Social Analysis: Gender (Judith Butler)
- Week 13: Social Analysis: Race (E. Patrick Johnson)
- Week 14 (quiz/break)
- Week 15: Review

Preparing course readings for busy conservatory music majors also proved tricky, and I tried to limit the weekly reading to thirty pages or less. Short articles and book introductions as well as excerpts from longer texts formed the core of our reading list. Usually the readings were assigned at the end of the

32. Cynthia Buch and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2008).

week for students to complete over the weekend; I also provided students with a set of questions to guide their reading. As often as possible, I tried to have students read the authors' original texts. Naturally, these texts presented an array of challenges to the students, both in terms of writing style and conceptual complexity. However, the readings built upon each other in a way that made the more complicated theoretical writings accessible when we reached them later in the semester.

On a side note, the difficulty of the reading also changed my approach to the course in other ways. First, it inspired me to take preemptive measures by devoting an entire class to a workshop on "How to Read Scholarly Writing." This entailed introducing students to theoretical frameworks in a general way ("metaphorical thinking," "preference for complexity and ambiguity") as well as giving examples of individual sentences as well as full paragraphs for them to dissect. We discussed organization and form in scholarly writing and read examples of how scholars deal with other scholarship, i.e., the "They-say, I-say" model.<sup>33</sup> I emphasized that learning these techniques would not only help students comprehend scholarly writing, it would also strengthen their own writing. Nonetheless, the psychological impact of this class—helping students feel prepared to engage with scholarly writing and not to be surprised or discouraged by it—is perhaps its most important aspect. Because I assigned difficult reading for homework, I included questions for students to answer that would help guide their attention while reading. The stakes were low for these homework assignments; if they made an effort to engage with the reading and answer the questions, students received a check mark. Naturally, class time was devoted to dissecting, clarifying, and applying the readings. In a reflective and anonymous end-of-class survey, about two-thirds of the 25 respondents said they felt that their ability to read complex material had improved over the course of the semester.

### Unit 1: Aesthetic Performance

Because I teach at a conservatory where performance inspires much of the campus life, I thought the class should begin with the kind of aesthetic or artistic performance media with which the students felt familiar. I define this as performance undertaken consciously (trained and rehearsed or planned) with some kind of artistic intent in a given duration; traditional concerts, theatrical productions, music videos, film, and performance art fall into this category. I felt that we should begin with global questions about the relationship of the

33. See Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

performer to the subject they present. Thus, we began in theater with a starting point I thought would be easily accessible: Western twentieth-century theater theory, including Constantin Stanislavsky, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, and Jerzy Grotowski. Given the growth of performance studies from theater, I thought the students would feel more of a connection to the later theoretical critical literature after having engaged first-hand with influential theater theories, such as Stanislavsky's method acting, Brechtian alienation, and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. But the basic questions addressed by these theories—"How does the actor convey an emotional state?"; "What is the function of theater?"; "What is the role of the audience?"—gave students a clearer idea of the foundational problems in theater, the original source of the field. At the same time, music performance majors immediately began pondering how these questions might relate to their own work.

From this starting point, an instructor could take the course in a variety of directions, privileging various kinds of content as suited to the student population. I wanted students to engage with a broad range of media, including performances from non-Western cultures. In my experience, students enjoy this variety, and it helps include the entire class in discussions over the course of the semester. A student who may not feel particularly engaged with the history of dada and surrealism may come to life in a discussion of Beijing opera. The content of the course overlapped somewhat with that of my twentieth-century music history survey, but in this case it was a matter of relating artistic trends and themes to musical developments, rather than the other way around. Students had already taken at least one of the earlier courses in the music history survey, so we could also draw on that base of knowledge for classroom discussion.

For typical classes during this unit, we often read a theoretical text, then applied it by analyzing examples of performance in class. Class discussion might move freely between the theoretical writing and examples. In one case, students read Brecht's articles on "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" and "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting;" in class we discussed the readings then applied them by interpreting the 1931 film version of Lotte Lenya singing "Pirate Jenny" from Weill's *Threepenny Opera*.<sup>34</sup> I asked the class to analyze how the distancing effect was at play in the performance. Students pointed to specific elements of the performance, such as Lenya's flat affect, tone of voice, and minimal motions. In a related class, we read scholarly analysis of Brecht's

34. The film version of the *Threepenny Opera* was directed by G. W. Pabst, and makes substantial changes to the original Brecht/Weill score. See Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

experience with Chinese opera, then explored filmed performance of Beijing opera from the 1950s.<sup>35</sup>

These in-class experiences provide students a low-stakes environment in which to practice observational analysis and argumentative discussion. If a final goal of a class is to help students learn to make analytic thesis statements, then I ask them to make “interpretive claims,” which one student might volunteer; then, as a group we try to provide evidence to support the claim. This strategy helps to focus the practice on a specific goal and prepares students for the kind of analysis they perform in their blog assignments later in the semester.<sup>36</sup>

Another general goal of the class is to help students become more aware of performance as embodiment. Although this was a main theme throughout the class, we performed some specific activities, including Grotowski acting exercises and a class happening, and had a day led by one of the acting professors at the conservatory.<sup>37</sup> Although to some students, Grotowski’s suggestions for developing theatrical embodiment may seem bizarre (“become a tree”), the very engagement with these more radical ideas helped raise their awareness of various kinds of acting and the role of the body therein.<sup>38</sup> For music performance majors, this is especially useful in recognizing how performance goes beyond the narrowly defined technical training relating to their instruments.

## Unit 2: Performativity

This unit comprised more of the core of “performance studies.” With the term “performativity,” I referred to what Schechner describes in his *Performance Studies* textbook as “something that is like a performance without being a performance in the orthodox or formal sense. . . . Increasingly, social, political, economic, personal, and artistic realities take on the qualities of performance.”<sup>39</sup> The term also draws on the concept of everyday performance articulated by

35. The reading for this class was a short chapter, “The Effect of Displacement: Brecht’s Concept of ‘Alienation Effect’ and Traditional Chinese Theatre,” in Min Tian, *The Poetics of Difference and Displacement: Twentieth-Century Chinese-Western Intercultural Theatre* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008): 39–59.

36. For a discussion of the value of this approach, see Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works*, 124–30.

37. For more information, see Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (New York: Routledge, 2002), and Allan Kaprow, *How to Make a Happening*, 1966, Mass Art Inc. M-132, 33 1/3 rpm (available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iCM-YIjyHE>)

38. Another activity I found productive was to have students compare and analyze The National Theatre’s different versions of Ophelia’s mad scene from *Hamlet*. Each version was designed to represent the different interpretations that could be drawn from major theatrical practitioners of the twentieth century: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski, and Brook. See, for example, “Five Truths: Bertolt Brecht,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62-gYcO6jrY\\_](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62-gYcO6jrY_)

39. Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 123.

Goffman in his 1959 book *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. I was surprised at the ease with which students transitioned from discussing aspects of aesthetic performances to more theoretical issues, such as Judith Butler's ideas of gender performativity. I tried to structure this unit in a general chronological order, so that the critical theories would build upon each other. My main pedagogical goal was to help students become more aware and critical of the ways in which identities are constructed through various performative means.

Although class time was condensed, we discussed matters of social ritual, liminality, gender, sexuality, and race. I knew that the broad nature of the subject material could lead us far afield from music, but given that the class was a music elective, we continued to use musical examples as sites for the overlap of performance and the performative. For example, transgender composer Alex Temple wrote an eloquent blog detailing her personal experiences navigating the relationship between performance and performativity; this proved to be a particularly instructive resource for students trying to understand the differences between performances on stage and in everyday life.<sup>40</sup>

During this unit, we explored variations on the theme of identity as performative. We began with speech acts, which challenged the students to consider the functions of language.<sup>41</sup> As young professionals, students were also interested in how online utterances, such as public postings on Facebook, could be understood as speech acts that contribute to digital performativity more broadly. The concept of speech as performance could be another inroad—in a more conventional music history class—into the topics of criticism, marketing, and identity formation for various historical figures and groups.

Subsequent weeks included discussions of gender, sexuality, and race, as well as the intersections between them. We analyzed both Beyoncé's *Lemonade* and the public reception of it, including Saturday Night Live's parody of white people realizing that "Beyoncé is black."<sup>42</sup> As one student reported in the end-of-class survey, "Especially in terms of 'blackness,' I had not considered the performativity of race." Another fascinating musical intersection was E. Patrick Johnson's ethnographic work on a white Australian gospel choir, which raised questions about the role of performance in the appropriation and constitution of identity.<sup>43</sup>

40. Alex Temple, "I'm a Trans Composer: What the Hell Does That Mean?" *New Music Box* (blog), 13 July 2013, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/im-a-trans-composer-what-the-hell-does-that-mean/>.

41. See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

42. *Saturday Night Live*, season 41, episode 13, directed by Don Roy King, written by Rob Klein et al., on NBC, 13 February 2016, <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/the-day-beyonce-turned-black/2985361?snl=1>.

43. E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

## Assessment

Considering the two main outcomes of the course, namely: 1) to identify and describe trends in aestheticized performance in various arts; and 2) to articulate and apply theories of performance to socio-cultural case studies, I structured quizzes to include both factual and analytic components. In the first half, students had to identify and articulate the significance of artistic movements, performances, and people, from Alex Temple's song cycle *Behind the Wallpaper* to scholars such as Judith Butler. The other portion of the quiz required the analysis of a performance that was new to them; these examples included Nina Simone's cover of "Pirate Jenny" as well as various pieces of performance art, such as Olivier de Sagazan's "Transfiguration." I tried to select performances that were multivalent and open to numerous readings. We had practiced analysis and interpretation in class, and students generally exhibited progress in their ability to make argumentative claims backed with evidence from the performances they were analyzing. As with critical listening, I encouraged students to "language" their reactions to pieces and to explain how specific details could contribute to broader hermeneutic readings.<sup>44</sup>

The main term-paper component was a blog in which students applied some kind of theoretical framework to a topic of their choice. As Sara Haefeli notes in her article "Using Blogs for Better Student Outcomes," blogging offers students a kind of flexibility, particularly in terms of writing style, that a more formal academic paper does not.<sup>45</sup> I found that blogging also lent itself more readily to a citation format (in-text hyperlinks) and incorporation of images that students already understand. This familiarity with the medium also allowed students to focus on the important matter of analyzing a performance of their choice while at the same time offered them a wider range of "acceptable" writing and presentation styles—i.e., blogging as performative act. The key component in this assignment, however, was not the medium of the blog, but rather the element of student self-determination. Students enjoyed being able to analyze topics close to their hearts, from football as *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the distancing effect in YouTube sensation Jon Sudano's videos. The blog assignment was structured in multiple components over the semester: 1) choose a topic, 2) complete a full draft, 3) peer review those in their discussion groups according to a set of review guidelines, 4) submit a final version. Each component counted toward the final grade.

44. For more on languaging reactions in the context of critical listening, see Robert C. Lagueux, "Inverting Bloom's Taxonomy: The Role of Affective Responses in Teaching and Learning," this *Journal* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 121–50.

45. Sara Haefeli, "Using Blogs for Better Student Writing Outcomes," this *Journal* 4, no. 1, (Fall 2013), 39–70, here p. 43.



In addition to these written assignments, class discussions offered students a low-stakes opportunity for exploring the process of interpretation and the creation of meaning. As discussion moderator, I focused on asking questions rather than explaining, often to help students discuss evidence in support of their ideas (“Ok, and what is giving you that impression?” “I didn’t see that the first time through; can you explain?”). Students knew that I did not mean these questions in a challenging way, but simply as requests for more information and evidence. At other times I drew their attention to elements they may have missed (“What about the actual performance itself? How about her gestures?” or “Let’s watch again, and this time focus on the soundtrack”). Sometimes discussion centered on understanding a scholarly analysis, which helped students grasp a broad range of interpretive possibilities. Above all, students became more comfortable with hermeneutic analysis. The “right vs. wrong” dichotomy was replaced with more of a sliding scale of “more-to-less convincing” interpretations—i.e., in pedagogical terms, the practice of forming and reforming interpretations helps the students move from Perry’s “dualistic thinking” to a higher level of cognitive development.<sup>46</sup>

### Further Options

For those with less curricular flexibility, there are different strategies for incorporating performance studies into other music classes. A major consideration for an instructor is whether she or he wants to devote time to the more difficult theoretical readings. For shorter, digestible snippets in textbook format, Schechner’s *Performance Studies: An Introduction* covers the basics; excerpts from this text could supplement other historical readings and provide a useful basis for discussion.<sup>47</sup> John Emigh’s *Masked Performance* includes an appendix of “Basic Questions that Might Be Asked About Performances,” which can be used to help students approach performances in non-Western contexts or to reevaluate performances with which they already feel familiar.<sup>48</sup>

Some elements of a performance studies class work hand-in-hand with music courses. Concepts associated with performativity are broadly applicable to many courses, but especially those highlighting gender, race, sexuality, disability, and any other intersections with identity construction. With respect to

46. See William G. Perry Jr., *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970).

47. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*.

48. I have used this list of questions in an assignment for a twentieth-century music history survey in which students must research original performing and cultural contexts of gamelan music before analyzing how the composer Lou Harrison “incorporated gamelan” into his music. See John Emigh, *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual Theatre* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

more traditional Western music history surveys, some topics lend themselves readily to discussions incorporating methodological perspectives from performance studies. Baroque gesture, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the notion of virtuosity, for example, all raise questions about the nature of performance, embodiment, audience interaction, and the production of meaning. Further specific points of intersection include Brecht's and Weill's *Threepenny Opera*; specifically, the 1931 film version can be a great case study for understanding the distancing effect. John Cage, happenings, and performance art can redirect the question of "what is music" more broadly to "what is performance?" Such questions can easily lead to discussions of performance in everyday life.

Establishing a conceptual framework of performance and performativity helps to prepare students for broad questions that address both specific aesthetic performances (e.g., comparing and contrasting opera productions) as well as socio-cultural questions of identity (e.g., analyzing how nationalism is performed in music criticism). Naturally, these categories may overlap, but helping students recognize differences in the first place may make them more aware of those intersections (such as "how are race and gender performed in specific opera productions?").<sup>49</sup>

### Student Feedback

Students completed an anonymous online survey in the final week of class so that I could gauge reception of the course and look for suggestions should I teach it again. The six questions were:

- 1) Do you think this course (Introduction to Performance Studies) should be a permanent option in the conservatory curriculum? That is, should it become a permanent course offering on rotation instead of a one-time special topics? Why or why not?
- 2) Has this course challenged the way you think in any way? Please explain if so.
- 3) What topics, readings, or theories have been especially interesting to you?
- 4) Do you have recommendations for material I should include or cut if I teach the course again?
- 5) Do you have recommendations about the structure of the course? (order of topics, type of assignments)
- 6) What about the readings: do you feel as if you are improving in an ability to read and digest complex ideas? (along those lines, did the time we spent in class going over How to Read a Scholarly Article help? Is there some way I could make it more helpful?)

49. See, for example, Mari Yoshihara, "The Flight of the Japanese Butterfly: Orientalism, Nationalism, and Performances of Japanese Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 56 (2004): 975–1001.

Of the 25 respondents, students agreed by an overwhelming majority that the course should be offered again (88%). Many explained that they enjoyed learning about performance beyond their major; others cited how easily they made transfers to their concentrations. One student, self-identifying as a music therapy major, argued that it was necessary and important to recognize the applicability of performance to everyday life. Another student found the class to be useful preparation for graduate school in terms of concepts and skill acquisition. Topics that seemed to stand out to students included the theater theories; intersectionality (particularly with regard to race and gender theory); and the analysis of pop culture performances (including film). In general, there seemed to be about a 50-50 split concerning the two major class units: some students preferred the material from the first half of class, others preferred the social issues we discussed in relation to performativity.

For the second question, a majority of students (76%) responded that yes, the course had challenged them to reconsider their notions of performance. Others preferred to state that the course had “broadened the way they think,” rather than “challenged.” Only one felt already familiar with the content and concepts. Within the majority, students found it had encouraged critical thinking in various ways, and the responses were unique. Some students expressed that they learned to see multiple perspectives—as one wrote, “I never thought that there could be so many different ways of interpreting just one thing, and this course helped me to realize that,” while another now “look[s] for meaning in the smaller details.” Many focused on the concepts from the second half of class, noting that they had not considered the performativity of gender and race. Students also applied the content to their individual specialties, including one of the composers, who “found it aided in my ‘presentation of character’ in writing pieces. I never thought about that before.” Another student, presumably a music performance major, wrote that “applying this level of analysis to performance expanded my scope for what you can decide on and work on in a performance.” In short, the students seemed to have successfully drawn on course material to transfer to their own experiences and concentrations.

## **Conclusion**

The students generally enjoyed the course and found its ideas applicable to both their music performances and to life in general. That said, my findings here are necessarily preliminary, given that the course has only run once so far. However, I find the course has potential to transform learning, and I recommend exploring performance studies as a means of teaching critical thinking, not the least because its focus on performance offers a starting point that most students intuitively understand. A full, semester-long introductory course can

supplement and enrich a music curriculum, but concepts and case studies may be incorporated into music classes as well. The beauty of the course and the field is its flexibility: instructors may want to incorporate more material on digital performativity, play, or performance and ritual in non-Western contexts than I did. The range of methodological perspectives and subjects covered in performance studies is vast, but I hope to have offered a preliminary guide for designing a course that can be accessible and engaging for music majors.