MUSIC 106A: INTRODUCTION TO COMPOSITION  
Fall 2018: MWTh 12:00-12:50

Instructor: Professor David Rakowski  
TA: Luke Blackburn (lblackburn@brandeis.edu)  
Office: Slosberg 217, x6-3339.  
Office hours: To be announced

Prerequisites: Ability to read music and desire to compose. Piano proficiency is helpful but not essential. Some music theory is extremely helpful also, but not required.

Format: Topics and discussion of pieces of music in large class format on Wednesdays and Thursdays; students will meet in small groups with Luke Blackburn, a third hour, in lieu of the Monday meetings (as this is a 3 credit course, you will average 3 hours in class and small group meetings per week). The small groups or private meetings will take place in an office or a classroom, at times to be arranged. Most of the written work assigned will be in the form of short exercises; the assignment will be made in class and must be completed by the time of your meeting with Luke. Assignments and compositions will sometimes be performed in the class meetings.

Grading: This is a credit/no credit course. No letter grades. Do the work regularly and dedicatedly (if that is a word) and you will pass. Since so much of how quickly the class progresses is based on how the class is doing, it is difficult to predict just how much material will be covered, and what the scope of a final project may be, if there is indeed one. It would be nice if the class could become an ensemble to perform an informal concert of music composed for the class at the end of the term.

Attendance policy: Three unexcused absences are permitted from class meetings and small group meetings. Anyone with four unexcused absences will fail the course. See the Brandeis official documents for what constitutes an excused absence.

Students with disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the instructor immediately.

- ASSIGNMENTS: Probably at least once per week, composition exercises and similar assignments will be given. They must be completed in time for your small group or private meetings with Luke Blackburn, as this time will usually be devoted to the examination of your assignments. Some assignments will be performed in class and subject to the criticism of the entire class. You may make changes to your assignments based on the advice of the instructor and TA, or not.
- SHORT PAPERS: Two typed papers of 3 to 10,000 pages each will be required the first semester: one will describe a piece or assignment written for the class: the other will be a "concert report" of a
concert of 20th century music (there are several such concerts at Brandeis this and every fall). These are due at the same time as the portfolio, but may be handed in earlier.

- PORTFOLIOS: There are no midterm or final examinations. Instead, a portfolio consisting of all the revised assignments and papers will be due on the first day of exams. **Please do not discard any of the work you do for this class.**

- PERFORMANCES: We will endeavor to hear pieces written for the class performed in class.

- BRANDEIS NEW MUSIC: Though not required, attendance at Brandeis New Music concerts (concerts of works by enrolled graduate students—see Slosberg schedule; they also count as concerts of 20th century music) is strongly recommended. Composer colloquia (see Slosberg bulletin boards) are also recommended. You may also be interested in the colloquia given by finalists for the composer job being filled this year. A report on a colloquium may be substituted for the concert report.

- COMPOSITIONAL STYLE: No particular compositional "style" is assumed or enforced in this class. We will make every effort to distinguish between valid musical criticism and dogma. However, we are determined to challenge you and not let you get away with simply writing more of the same kind of stuff you already know how to write (if you want to learn how to write a pop song, this is not even close to being the right course for you). The course is designed to let you put your fingers into several different pies1 in the first semester so that you can get a taste of some things that you would otherwise have not tried, so that you can have a wider range of choices for how you proceed in your own work.

- REVOLUTIONARINESS: If somehow you manage to revolutionize Western Art Music with one of your assignments, you will automatically pass.

**TOPICS MAY INCLUDE, BUT WILL NOT BE LIMITED TO:**

- **VOCAL WRITING:** Multiple settings of poetic couplets for unaccompanied voice; later, instrumental accompaniments may be added to these settings.

- **SINGLE LINE PIECES:** Solo instrument pieces (probably for flute) based on Debussy **Syrinx** and Varèse **Density 21.5**.

- **OSTINATO:** Short piano pieces using ostinato based on Stravinsky's **L'Histoire du Soldat**, Three Pieces for String **Quartet**, and others.

- **MOTIVIC TRANSFORMATION:** Exercises and a piece which build melodic phrases from small motifs. Model: Schoenberg, **Songs, Op. 22**.

- **WRITING IN VARIOUS SCALES:** Pieces based on examples from Debussy, Messiaen and Stravinsky.

- **EXTENDED TONALITY AND MODALITY:** Piano pieces based on examples from Debussy and Ravel.

- **ACCOMPANIED SONGS:** settings of 4- and 8-line poems for voice and piano.

Some topics may be covered based on suggestions from class members.

Some sessions may feature guest lectures by professional composers and/or faculty composers; if a guest composer speaks in class, you may substitute a paper about the guest composer's lecture for the concert report.

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1 Some of the other phrases we tend to use are "broaden your horizons" and "open your eyes to new ideas." We wish we were more original.
POETIC COUPLETS
[...........] denotes that there is more to the poem

Shakespeare, from Sonnet 18

    Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
    Thou art more lovely and more temperate, [........]

Thomas Campion: from There Is a Garden in Her Face

    There is a garden in her face,
    Where roses and lilies grow, [........]

John Donne: from Elegy IX The Autumnal

    No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace,
    As I have seen in one autumnal face. [........]

Ben Johnson: To Fool or Knave

    Thy praise or dispraise is to me alike:
    One doth not stroke me, nor the other strike.

Ben Johnson: from Slow, Fresh Fount

    Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears;
    Yet slower, yet, O faintly, gentle springs! [........]

William Wordsworth: from She Was a Phantom of Delight

    She was a phantom of delight
    When first she gleamed upon my sight; [........]

Ezra Pound: In a Station of the Metro

    The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
    Petals on a wet, black bough.

Tom Chandler: from world’s saddest song

    this broken fiddle
    played by a thousand ants [........]

Louise Bogan: from From Heine

    [........] It sings of constant love;
    Even in this dream I hear it.

Marilyn Chin: from Unrequited Love

    Because you stared into the black lakes of her eyes,
    you shall drown in them. [........]