

**MUS 212, Graduate Composition Seminar, Winter 2009**  
**Michael Dessen, University of California, Irvine**  
**Syllabus**

Course meets: Mondays, 1-3:50pm, AITR 196

Course webpage: <http://music.arts.uci.edu/mdessen>

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Phone: (949) 824-0386

Office hours: Thursday 11:30am-1:30pm, and by appointment

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### **Course overview**

This seminar is the second quarter of a year-long sequence for first-year Music MFA students in Integrated Composition, Improvisation and Technology (ICIT). Each quarter is taught by a different ICIT faculty member.

For this quarter, you will do three in-class presentations. The assignments are detailed below. Some will enable you to pursue your own direction, and others will require you to engage creatively with music and ideas you're less familiar with. Another important goal is to practice offering helpful critique to others, as well as sharpen our presentation and listening skills.

### **Presentation assignments**

Presentations should be roughly 35-45 minutes (20-25 minutes of presentation and 15-20 minutes of discussion).

#### Presentation #1: Outside artist selected from list

For this you'll present on a piece selected from a list I'll provide, which we'll work out in the first class meeting. I encourage you to be creative, but with careful attention to both details and the broader dynamics that give them meaning. A notated score may or may not be available. Your discussion can touch on multiple dimensions of music making, including questions of historical or cultural context, but along the way you must somehow address technical details of craft and how the music is constructed. In cases where a longer piece or an entire album is the topic, you should choose a short track or some excerpts to focus on in more detail (and listen to in class).

#### Presentation #2: Your own creative project

This presentation is on a new creative project of your own. Please do not use pieces you've already presented in other classes this year, or ones from further back in your past. Instead, you should share with us either a newly completed work, such as a short piece created just for this occasion, or a presentable draft of a currently evolving project. Give an overview of how and why you created the music, and provide either a performance or decent quality recording in class. The approach and instrumentation is up to you, but if you depend upon other performers to realize the music, keep in mind that it is your responsibility to work out practical details (i.e. arrange for them to perform it in class, or record it ahead of time). Avoid having people sightread music in class if you know that will not give good results.

#### Presentation #3: Your own creative project in response to outside artist's work

For this you will present a short project that you create as a "response" to a piece from the Presentation #1 list or any other piece of your choice that you clear with me ahead of time. "Response" does not mean you have to imitate exactly the style or sound of that music, and in fact that is probably the most banal approach you could take. What musical values, sensibilities or ways of listening or structuring time informed it? How might you reimagine or recontextualize one or more specific elements (technical, sonic, or conceptual) of that piece, within the possibilities of your own skills as a composer, improviser or technologist? How could you use the piece not as a model but as a subject to engage in dialogue, or a spark for something that takes you out of your normal way of working? Again, the instrumentation and method are up to you, but in addition to discussing the music you should provide either an in-class performance or a recording.

### **Feedback/critique**

Most of the feedback that you'll get from me this quarter will take place during our class discussions, when you will also learn from other students' comments and questions. However, I will provide some written feedback at the end of the quarter, and at other times if necessary.

The question of what makes for productive critique - not only from me, but from all of you - is

more complicated than it might first seem, especially in a context like this where we will encounter musical forms with radically different performance contexts and goals. In the first class, I will provoke some discussion on this, and suggest some general guidelines for in-class critiques and discussions.

### **Grading**

I expect you to put in at least 6 hours on average per week outside of class working on your projects for this course. Your grade should reflect your effort and creativity on your own projects as well as your contributions to class critiques. Any projects that you do not complete in time to present will lower your course grade. You can consider the three presentations as well as class participation to be equal in weight (25% each), but I will not be assigning grades to individual projects. Instead, by Thursday noon of exam week, you should email me the grade you think you would give yourself for the course, taking everything into account, and explaining briefly why you think you deserve that grade. I will assign you a grade, and send a note with final comments.

### **Schedule**

#### Jan. 5

Introduction and scheduling

#### Jan. 12

Presentation #1: JK, IO, CW

#### Jan. 19

No class (UCI holiday)

#### Jan. 26

Presentation #1: FM, MJ, DP

#### Feb. 2

Presentation #1: CD

Presentation #2: JK, IO

#### Feb. 9

Guest presentation (graduate composers from UC San Diego)

Presentation #2: CW

#### Feb. 16

No class (UCI holiday)

#### Feb. 23

Presentation #2: FM, MJ, DP

#### March 2

Presentation #2: CD

Presentation #3: JK, IO

#### March 9

Presentation #3: CW, FM, MJ

#### March 16 (exam week)

Presentation #3: DP, CD

Final course wrap up

### **Special needs**

If you have a disability that affects your ability to complete the assignments or tests on time, you must have it documented through the [Disabilities Services Office](#) and contact me through them at the beginning of the quarter to make any necessary arrangements in advance.

### **Office hours and getting help**

If you have any trouble with the course, it is important to seek help early rather than wait until the end of the quarter. If you want to meet but cannot make my office hours, please [email me](#) some times you are free.