

## Royal S. Brown: History and Aesthetics of Film Music (Fall 2009)

### DESCRIPTION:

The course will examine the entire phenomenon of film music and the technical, artistic, aesthetic, psychological, and political problems it poses. As an ongoing process, we will track the evolution of film music and how its metamorphoses run parallel to and diverge from those in the art and commerce of the cinema. For the “classical” film score, which will comprise the greatest area of focus in this course, we will examine essential differences between film and concert music. Scores will be studied in the light of how the composer has solved both the musical and dramatic problems at hand, and we will discuss the ways in which varying musical styles, from romantic to avant-garde, have been deployed in the cinematic context. In many instances, the musical score opens doors onto deeper readings of the filmic text, and we will explore some of the ways in which this occurs. The movement of film music into non-classical areas, in particular pop and jazz, will also be examined, as will the recent shift towards electronics (synthesizers, sampling, etc.) and new tendencies in film/music interactions, such as the breakdown of the distinction between source (diegetic) and nondiegetic music. We will also examine film music not just in its relation to narrative but *as* a form of narrative (see Tarasti et al.). Numerous examples from films and scores will be presented in class. Please note that, because of time constraints and because of the massive amount of material, the course will focus mostly on sound-era films from their inception into the 1980’s. During the last class, however, which will take place during finals week, we will examine some more recent tendencies, with emphasis on Howard Shore’s chamber score for David Cronenberg’s film *Spider* (2002).

### SUGGESTED READINGS (books):

Bazelon, Irwin: *Knowing the Score: Notes on Film Music* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975).

Brown, Royal S.: *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (University of California Press, 1994).

Flinn, Caryl: *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

Gorbman, Claudia: *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Indiana University Press, 1987).

Meyer, Leonard B.: *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (University of Chicago Press, 1956).

Shepherd, John: *Music as Social Text* (Polity Press, 1991).

Tarasti, Eero: *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).