Critical Approaches to the Music of Benjamin Britten

University of Toronto Faculty of Music
Seminar meets: Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00 p.m., EJB E012

Instructor: Dr. Sherry D. Lee
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3:00 - 4:30 p.m., Rm. 257, or by appointment
Office Phone: 416-946-3529
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Course Description: This course offers us the opportunity to examine Benjamin Britten’s music from a range of pertinent critical perspectives, including theories of gender and sexuality, music and narrative, voice and performance, political and social engagement, and possibly other issues of interest to students. Repertoire for study will be selected by the class. Our approach to study will involve both engaging the works analytically as informed by current critical perspectives, and also using the repertoire as a lens through which to examine recent musicological approaches to the composer and his works, allowing for meta-critique of the approaches themselves.

Course Materials: All required reading materials are available through the Music Library, whether on reserve (books, photocopies, recordings) or online (ebooks, journals, audio files). When possible, items and/or links will be posted on the course Blackboard page.

Expectations: All students should attend each session, and should complete weekly assigned reading and listening in advance, in preparation for active participation in class discussion. Seminar presentations should be delivered in an organized and polished form. Written work should be completed with a computer word processor, carefully edited and spellchecked, and printed in a 12-point font on white 8-1/2 x 11-inch paper with 1-inch margins. Written assignments should also be accompanied by properly-formatted bibliographies and foot/endnotes in which all sources consulted for completion of the assignment are duly acknowledged. Details of all required coursework are given below.

All students should visit the website of the School of Graduate Studies to familiarize themselves with policies regarding academic conduct: <http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/>

Evaluation: Seminar Participation 20%
Seminar Presentation 30%
Written Assignment 10%
Final Paper 40%

Please take note of the University of Toronto School of Graduate Studies Policy on Graduate Grading and Evaluation, including the Graduate Grade Scale, available at: <http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/grgrade.html>
**COURSE SCHEDULE:** *This outline is flexible and subject to change; student suggestions are welcome.*

Weekly reading and listening assignments will be determined by the class as the course progresses, and posted in advance on the course Blackboard page. Some library materials have been placed on reserve; others will be added as the course content is determined. Many materials are also available online: the Naxos recording library may be used for several items in the Britten repertory; links to other online materials may also be posted.

**Week 1**  
**Introduction**  
9 Sept.  
Introduction to the class and the course

**Week 2**  
*A Time There Was . . .*  
16 Sept.  
Documentary screening

**Week 3**  
*Turning the Screw*  
23 Sept.  
Instructor presentation – *The Turn of the Screw*  
Intermediary course planning session

**Weeks 4-5**  
*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*  
30 Sept. - 7 Oct.  
Group study and Panel planning  
Final course planning session

**Weeks 6-9**  
Student-guided repertoire study and presentations  
14 Oct.- 4 Nov.  
[Instructor presentation 14 Oct. – *Lachrymae*.]  
Weekly repertoire and reading assignments TBD

**Week 10**  
*“Reading Break”*  
11 Nov.  
No class meeting – instructor available for meetings during class time

**Weeks 11-13**  
Student-guided repertoire study and presentations  
18 Nov-2 Dec.  
Weekly repertoire and reading assignments TBD

12 Dec.  
*Final Paper Due*
**Critical Approaches:**
The following is a selection of critical frameworks that will guide our inquiries into Britten's music and the scholarship surrounding it:

- Music and Narrative
- Literary Adaptation
- Gender and Sexuality
- Identity and Recognition
- Politics and Pacifism
- Film and Modern Media
- Musical Language and Modernism
- Encounters with the English Tradition
- Exoticism and Otherness
- Religion, Allegory, Parable
- Community Ideals
- Children and Childhood Innocence
- Performance and Interpretation

**Detail of Assignments:**
Weekly expectations include the completion of the assigned reading and listening in preparation for active involvement in class discussion. Because the course is designed to allow class members to tailor the content according to their interests, active individual planning and research is required from the outset of the course.

1. **Group Work on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream***: The Canadian Opera Company’s 2008-2009 season includes a production of Britten’s Shakespearean opera, which will run 5-23 May, 2008. On Saturday, 9 May, there will be a public symposium hosted by the COC/Jackman Humanities Institute-sponsored Opera Exchange, focused on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The interdisciplinary Exchange initiative is jointly programmed by Professors Caryl Clark, Linda Hutcheon, Katherine Larson, and Sherry Lee, who – in a moment of collective inspiration – decided that one of the symposium’s scheduled events would be a discussion panel featuring members of this class. Accordingly, two weeks near the beginning of our course (possibly more if the class deems it necessary) will be devoted to joint study of this work and planning for the panel presentation next spring. In lieu of completing regular weekly reading and listening assignments, students should make use of the initial weeks of the course for the purpose of discussing and selecting materials and topics for study of this work. We will discuss this initiative further as the course progresses.

2. **Written Assignment**: A critical response paper (3-4 pp. in length) to an assigned article in the recent Britten literature. This assignment may be submitted electronically any time up until Tuesday, 25 November, 1:00 p.m. Papers will be “published” online via the class Blackboard page for all members of the class to read. If you have a presentation scheduled late in the term, please be sure to hand in this written assignment earlier, at least two or three weeks before the final deadline.

3. **Individual Presentations**: A substantial presentation focused on an individual work (or limited selection of related works) that offers an analytical and interpretive perspective informed by the critical approaches guiding the course. Presentations will be scheduled within the first two weeks of the term. Early in the semester (by the fourth class meeting at the latest), each student
should select two or three possible works of interest, and present them to the instructor and the class for approval. Students will determine required listening and reading assignments for study and discussion by class members that are pertinent to their presentations, and assign these (online) at least one week before their presentation dates. Each student is requested to supply the instructor with a copy of presentation notes and bibliography consulted in class on the date of the presentation.

(4) Final Research Paper: a paper (12–18 pp. in length, exclusive of musical examples and bibliography) on a topic of your choice, as approved by the instructor. Please note that your topic must be approved no later than Tuesday, 18 November 2008 – papers will not be accepted unless their topics have been approved. Students are requested to prepare a proposal/an abstract of their topic (max. 500 words) to share with members of the class in the last seminar meeting, 2 Dec. 2008. The final paper is due Friday, 12 December, before 4:00 p.m.

**SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY – LIBRARY REFERENCE AND RESERVE MATERIALS:**

**Reference Items:** These are non-circulating library items.


**Reserve Items:** Please find attached the current list of items that have been placed on reserve for the seminar; the reserve list will grow as repertoire and readings for study are determined by students throughout the course.
Instructors’ Course Reserve List

Course Number: **MUS 1265H**  
Instructor: **SHERRY D. LEE**

*These items can be used in the library for 2 hours. Overdue fines are 50¢/hour.*

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<td>Ford, Boris, ed.</td>
<td><em>Britten’s Poets: the poetry he set to music (rev. ed.)</em></td>
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<td>Mitchell, Donald</td>
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<td>Palmer, Christopher, ed.</td>
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<td>ML 410.M23 O5 1995</td>
<td>Reed, Philip, ed.</td>
<td>On Mahler and Britten</td>
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<td>Rupprecht, Philip Ernst</td>
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<td>Seymour, Claire</td>
<td>Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion</td>
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