

## **UC Center Program Courses - Fall 2009**

### **French music in the Twentieth century**

**Prof. Marc Battier**

#### **Office Hours**

By appointment

#### **Course**

Tuesday 2:45-4:15 / 4:45-6:15

#### **Prerequisite**

None in particular. Ability to read music or play an instrument are not required.

#### **Course Requirements**

Students are expected to do each week's readings.

#### **Grading**

Weekly Readings and Class participation (25%)

Writing Assignments, a research paper, 4 pages (25%)

Mid-term exam (20%)

Final exam (30%)

#### **Course materials**

A Course Reader

#### **Course Description**

French music in the twentieth century has been a magnet which attracted composers from all over the world; its trademarks are invention of new forms, coloristic innovation, new orchestral textures, and use of new instruments, all of which woven into music aimed at the pleasure of listening. The course will show that even with some composers who have been called 'difficult' or 'dry', there is much to be found in terms of enjoyable sounds. And France has been the country which invented electronic music, right at the end of the late forties. Even latter-day Djs refer fondly to Pierre Henry and Pierre Schaeffer.

The course will focus on the major composers who have shaped the musical discourse of the last century. Some of their most well-known pieces will be presented and discussed. For instance, piano pieces (*La Cathédrale engloutie...*), orchestral music (*La Mer*) and opera (*Pelléas and Mélisande*) by Debussy; music by Eric Satie; orchestral music by Ravel (*Boléro, Concerto in G...*); music by Olivier Messiaen (chamber and orchestral music); the birth of *musique concrète*; the Serial school (Pierre Boulez); the Spectral school (Murail, Grisey) and electronic music.



## COURSE SCHEDULE

**Week 1.** Tuesday 09/08/09

### **Introduction and Overview – Claude Debussy and symbolism**

Overview of the course. Timeline. Modernism; influences; innovation; invention; research; new instruments;

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) is considered as the most important French composer in the early twentieth century. His music gives a transition between Wagner music and modernist music. After the 1890s, Debussy developed an independent musical language, writing orchestral and small pieces. For him, the sound colors are more important than the construction and linking of chords. Close to Symbolism, a literary and art movement, Debussy was active in the artistic circles of Paris. His well-known opera *Pelléas and Mélisande* is one of the most important music piece of European music: it tells a strange story of a young woman in a mysterious mood.

Listening: works by Claude Debussy

*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun)*, for orchestra

*La Mer. I. De l'aube a midi sur la mer* (for orchestra)

DVD: *Pelléas and Mélisande* (Claude Debussy)

**Week 2.** 09/22/09

### **Lili Boulanger and Eric Satie**

The remarkable work of Lili Boulanger (1893-1918) has been interrupted by her untimely death at the age of 24, but is a unique and beautiful voice at the beginning of the 20th century. A very musically gifted child, her father was a composer who had won the Prix de Rome and her mother was a musician, Lili Boulanger won the Prix de Rome at age 19 and went on to compose music for piano, for choir, for orchestra. Her sister was Nadia Boulanger.

A composer, pianist and writer, Eric Satie (1866-1925) is a precursor of many of the avant-garde artistic ideas. He known Debussy, lived in Montmartre in Paris. In 1898, he moved to Arcueil, a suburb of Paris. The composers around him formed *L'école d'Arcueil*. In his music and writings, he used simplicity and humour. The titles of his pieces are e.g. *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* (Tree pieces in the shape of a pear) or *Véritables Préludes flasques (pour un chien)* (Genuine Flabby Preludes (for a dog)). In 1919, he met Tristan Tzara, the initiator of the Dada movement, Picabia and Duchamp. He composed the music of the surrealist film *Entr'acte* by René Clair. In 1917, Erik Satie assembled a group of composers around himself known as *Les Nouveaux Jeunes*. Less than a year after, Satie left the group and, in 1918, Jean Cocteau published the text *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* with the idea to form an avant-garde group devoted to music. The composers of the *Groupe des six* were Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre. The 1920s at Paris, between the first and the Second World War, merged multiple influences as jazz, European and non-European folk cultures, circus and ballet.

Listening: *Parade* (Eric Satie)

**Week 3.** Friday 09/25/09

### **The French style and Maurice Ravel**

Born in the South of France, Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) was influenced by Debussy as well as by Mozart. His music is both impressionistic and strongly structured. Clarity, as most French music, is one of the most important idea of his musical style. Other influences like jazz, European folk songs and Asian music make his works varied and easy to hear. His *Boléro* is still a hit, but all his orchestral works, songs and operas (the funny *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*) are also quite popular and often played. With the help of films and multimedia presentations, we will look closely at the way two pieces are built (*Boléro*, *Concerto in G*).

Listening: *Boléro*, *Concerto in G major* (Maurice Ravel)

**Week 4.** 09/29/09

### **Music around Ballets Russes at Paris and Monte Carlo / The 1920s at Paris, the *Groupe des six* and American musicians in Paris**

In 1909, the Russian impresario Diaghilev created a ballet company named the *Ballets Russes*. Influenced by the great choreographer Marius Petipa, Diaghilev established his ballet at Paris then Monte Carlo. Balanchine, Fokine, Lifar and many other dancers and choreographers were associated with the ballet. Painters Braque, Picasso and Utrillo participated as stage designers. The greatest French composers of this time wrote some ballet music for the *Ballets Russes*: Debussy, Milhaud, Poulenc, Ravel and Satie. Some of these composers met in a informal gathering of composers, the *Groupe des six* (Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Germaine Tailleferre).

Stravinsky, very active in France at the time (he later moved to Los Angeles), must also be named. His famous ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* (The Rite of Spring) was composed between 1912 and 1913 for Serge Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*: its first performance at Théâtre des Champs Elysées created quite a stir!

Meanwhile, American artists visited Paris and often studied and lived here. An example is revolutionary composer George Antheil. We will watch his *Ballet mécanique*.

Listenings: *Le Sacre du printemps* (Stravinsky)

Listening: *Le Bœuf sur le toit* (Darius Milhaud)

DVD: *Ballet mécanique* (George Antheil)

**Week 5.** 10/06/09

### **A true pioneer: French-American composer Edgard Varèse / French invention in electronic musical instruments**

Born and raised in France, Edgar Varèse chose to live and work in New York. While commuting between France and the United States during his life, he became one of the most visionary composers, calling for modern and innovative means to create new music. His influence is felt even today.

He was also drawn to using electronic musical instruments, and France was, at that time, quite advanced in the invention of such instruments. We will look at the history of several electronic musical instruments such as the dynaphone, the ondes Martenot, the ondioline et the clavioline.

Listenings: *Ionisation* (Varèse)

RESEARCH PAPER – 4 PAGES

**Week 6.** 10/13/09

**Olivier Messiaen, new colors in music / Nadia Boulanger and her pupils**

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was an organist and ornithologist. Incarcerated by the Nazis in 1940, he composed his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the end of time) for his fellow inmates. Very famous in France and in the whole world, his music is both complex and beautiful to hear. He was attracted to rhythms from ancient Greece and from Indian music. He was interested by serialism, gamelan, birdsongs (*Oiseaux exotiques*) and electronic instruments and used the electronic ondes Martenot extensively. His faith, drawing on his unshakeable Catholicism, strongly influenced his music as in *Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus* (Twenty gazes on the child Jesus) for piano.

Older sister of Lili, Nadia Boulanger became the most important music teacher of the century. Many young composers studied under her supervision in the Fontainebleau school. Among them, numerous came from the United States. We will see how she may have helped shape musical awareness among her pupils.

Listening: *Turangalîla-Symphonie* (Olivier Messiaen)

**Week 7.** 10/20/09 - Mid-term exam

**Semester break**

**Week 8.** 11/03/09

**Serial school and Boulez**

Serialism is a musical technique of writing using sequences (“series”) of elements (pitches, durations, etc.). The serialist composer manipulates these sequences in various but strict ways (forward, backward, inverted...). Born in Vienna (Austria) before the Second World War with Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, serialism was first introduced in France in 1947. In the 1950s, composers such as Boulez (born in 1925) began to look at serial composition as an approach rather than a specific set of techniques (*Le Marteau sans maître*). Afterward, Boulez combined rigour of serialism with aleatory techniques (*Third Piano Sonata*) and computer-generated sounds (*Répons*). Boulez is also a conductor of renown (New York Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony Orchestra), a great writer on music. He is also the founder of the French music research center, IRCAM, at the Pompidou Center.

Listening: *Le Marteau sans maître* (Pierre Boulez)

**Week 9.** 11/10/09

**Birth of *musique concrète* and electronic music**

Pierre Schaeffer (1910–1995) was a scientist, a composer, a writer, and is known as the inventor of *musique concrète*. Traditionally, music starts as an abstraction (the

score), which is then produced into audible music. In the contrary, Schaeffer explained that *musique concrète* strives to start with recorded sounds ('concrete' elements), and turn them into an abstract musical composition. For Schaeffer, all kind of sounds could be included in music. He is a precursor to contemporary sampling practices. At the studio of Paris (in relationship with radio), Pierre Henry has been the most important composer of the Schaeffer's staff. Today, Henry is a reference for popular musicians. The studio still exists under the name GRM (2008 will be its 50th anniversary).

Listenings: *Messe pour le temps présent* (Henry), *Toupie dans le ciel* (Bayle)

### **Week 10. 11/17/09** **Spectral school**

Spectralism, a movement born in France in the 1970s, features the use of sound as a model for composition. The best known spectral composers at the origin of the movement are Dufourt, Grisey, Murail and Levinas. Like Debussy, Varèse and Schaeffer, the sound for itself is the core of the composition. Scientific analysis of one sound gives the partials and harmonics. On this model, composers write music, generally with traditional instruments. The spectralists' attitude of rigorous objectivity can be considered a continuation of modernism, as serialists, though in a very different way. Today, spectralism influences many composers.

Listenings: *Transitoires* (Grisey), *L'Esprit des dunes* (Murail).

### **Week 11. 11/24/09** **Science and music: how the computer changed music/IRCAM or how electronic music meets the orchestra**

Jean-Claude Risset is a French composer and scientist who studied with Max Mathews at the Bell Laboratories. He became a champion of computer music and his sound illusions are famous, as they have led to a new understanding of timbre. His computer compositions are also striking by the delicate quality of its sounds.

Listenings: *Sud* (Risset)

In the 1970s, President Pompidou discussed with Boulez the possibility of creating an institute at Paris where musicians and scientists ought to work together. This was to become IRCAM, a research center with the most advanced technology. In the beginnings, electronic music was most often recorded on tape, which thus 'fixed' it. Today, synthesized or transformed sounds, and spatialization, are often computed in real time. Another approach is computer assisted composition. One of the main member of the first staff was Jean-Claude Risset (who worked with Max Mathews in the USA). Boulez (*Anthèmes 2, Répons*), and Manoury (*Jupiter, K.*) are among the French composers close to IRCAM. Jonathan Harvey, an English musician, is also a great composer of Ircam. Today, IRCAM, as other music research centers in France, is still thriving on electronic music, with an opening to dance, multimedia, performance and network arts.

Listenings: *Jupiter* (Manoury), *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco* (Harvey)

**Week 12.** 12/01/09

**Independent composers, from Dutilleux to Iannis Xenakis and Jazz in France**

Henri Dutilleux (born in 1916) is one of the most important French composers of the second half of the 20th century, producing works in the tradition of Debussy and Ravel, but in a style distinctly his own. Dutilleux has always refused to be associated with any school. However, his music merges traditional and modernist innovations. His music also contains echoes of jazz as can be heard in the double bass introduction to his *First Symphony*. Maurice Ohana (1913-1992) was a French composer with a personal musical language. Interested by Mediterranean folk music and electroacoustic music, he worked in direction of a sound exploration without intellectual reference. François-Bernard Mâche, born in 1935, is a former student of Messiaen. As writer and composer, his thought explores myths, language and philosophy. He has composed electroacoustic, orchestral, chamber, choral, vocal and piano works. Iannis Xenakis may be regarded as a major composer of the second half of the century. Born in 1922 in Romania of Greek parents and raised mostly in Greece, he became an architect and worked with Le Corbusier. In the fifties, he started to compose music using mathematical operations and inspiration from architectural design, departing from the then ruling serial music. He became also inspired by Greek mythology. Xenakis devised his own path to new music. He is also a pionner of electroacoustic and computer music and composed one of the earliest algorithmic music. Later, he founded a music research center and a computer composition system, UPIC. He died in 2001. Among other influential French musicians, we will also discuss jazz's guitarist Django Reinhardt.

**Week 13.** 12/08/09

**Final exam.**