

MUS 507: Studies in Music History – Nationalism and Exoticism in 19th and 20th Century Music

Instructor: Deborah Heckert | Thursday, 9:30am – 12:20pm

Music is one of the primary ways in which nations and other social groups explore aspects of their group identity and define themselves against those people they consider as “other.” This is particularly true of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period that the historian Eric Hobsbawm has characterized as a time when the primary global activity was “nation building.” On the one hand, music helps to construct the myths of nationhood and otherness, and at the same time, can offer a critique of those myths.

This course will focus on the topic of music as an expression of national identity and a definition of exotic “otherness” during the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, exploring the range of music – solo and chamber music, orchestral music, and opera – that exploits these linked topics. A wide variety of music will be studied, including works by Wagner, Bizet, Mussorgsky, Dvorak, Debussy, Vaughan Williams, Stravinsky, Britten, Copland, and Reich. Readings will include selections from key writers on nationalism and post-colonial theory from a broad socio-cultural perspective, as well as important examples from the growing body of work in musicology drawing on and contributing to our understanding of nationalism and exoticism from a post-colonial perspective.

Assignments will include weekly readings, listening assignments, and reading responses, and a final seminar paper.

This course is primarily intended for MM and DMA students, for whom it fulfills the Elective Group 1 requirement. Students in the MA in Composition track must take either MUS 503 or MUS 507 in the first year.

3 credits