

**Title of lecture: MPhil – Musicology and Its Debates****Response from: Matthew Pritchard (8.12.13)**

Relatively few responses complained directly of there being too much reading for the course (the list had been expanded last year), and the very broad range of issues was generally considered a positive factor. However, a large number identified practical problems that arose out of confronting a large group (20 students on average this year) with a large number of texts. Many felt there was not enough time, both in class and between classes, and asked for longer seminars or more time between them: splitting the course over two terms with seminars at 2-week intervals was suggested. This might be considered as a possibility, as could a 4-hour seminar. I experimented with a 3.5 hour class at the end of last year's course without any complaints being raised: many students welcomed the extension. Though students' responses this year revealed that many valued the experience of getting to grips with a large amount of reading in itself, obviously a minimum ratio of class time to reading covered is an issue.

The group size was frequently felt to be too large and unwieldy for a comfortable flow of discussion in which a number of students – not only the most eager and confident – could participate. I sensed that the dynamic of discussion varied considerably between classes, depending on students' engagement with the reading set. However, although nothing could be done about the fundamental teacher-student ratio, I managed to experiment in one seminar with splitting the class into three groups, in order to create more informal settings for the discussion of a central text (Richard Taruskin's *Oxford History*). This allowed more participation, and I could move between groups and elicit responses from individual students more easily, without feeling that I was putting undue pressure on them in front of the whole group. In retrospect I think this was quite successful and could have been repeated, although most profitably with texts of comparable general interest and in classes where time pressure was not too much of a factor.

One of the factors contributing to time pressure and lessening general engagement was, as many responses pointed out, the large number of presentations on assigned material. Some felt that these were dry and/or too long. I did cut students off on occasion, but in general I felt that the opportunity provided for students to practise and develop their presentation skills was an important one (many had not been given such an opportunity before) – along with the impetus compelling students to engage in detail with texts that particularly interested them. If some presentations were less entertaining than others, this was to be expected and not necessarily less of a learning experience for individual students than moments of free-flowing class interaction. Adjustments could be made, but I feel (and should perhaps have made more explicit) that presentations are almost as an important

part of the course format as open discussion, as well as being more reliable for feedback and assessment purposes.