

Title of lecture: MPhil Musicology and its Debates – Michaelmas Term 2015**Response from: Dr Sam Barrett - 14th December 2015**

I was pleased to read the generally very positive responses to this course, especially given the effort expended this year in restructuring the course. My conclusion is that the new format of switching to two seminars a week has been a success, i.e. a single course leader taking the class through introductory sessions for a given topic on Wednesday afternoons, followed by invited seminars from UTOs and post-docs on their current research on Friday afternoons. This seems to have met a range of concerns expressed in previous years.

My response to individual points follows the pattern of the questions posed:

1a) quantity of weekly set reading

About half of the class participants thought there was too much reading set, while the other half thought that the amount was about right. Nobody thought that there was too little. On reflection, the reading for a few sessions might have been cut down in size, e.g. the first Music & Science seminar, although the key issue might be providing more guidance in advance about the strategies of reading to be employed. I experimented with reading one text very closely for the penultimate seminar, while allowing the class to read quickly through the others. This seemed to be well received and similarly varied strategies might be adopted per week.

b) quality/type of texts set

This was mostly very positively received. The odd student wanted a greater range of topics, e.g. popular music or ethnomusicology. I explained during the class that this was due in part to these topics appearing as Lent Term short courses and in part due to the expertise of invited speakers for the Friday seminars. Graduate Committee might like to consider whether a greater range or duplication of topics considered in Lent Term courses is desirable.

c) quality/duration of sessions

A few students noted that they very much enjoyed the small group discussions. I could have used this format a little more often as it seemed to lighten the load of 2-hour discussions, which some found heavy going. Several students noted that the discussions improved as members of the class grew in confidence, which may have been related to the opportunity to discuss texts among themselves prior to reporting back to the wider class.

2 Most useful/enjoyable

Perhaps inevitably, the discussions and the wide range of reading were mentioned by several participants. I was gratified that a few students liked my style of leading the debates and offering short introductions to the readings that set them in a wider context.

3 Least useful/enjoyable

Several students noted that the topics barely related to their research or took time away from it. I wonder whether this is necessarily a bad thing and would invite Graduate Committee to give the issue some consideration. Two mentioned that the course was Cambridge-centric, but others appreciated the opportunity to learn about the distinctive research being conducted here.

4 Change one thing about the course

A number of students found the class size too large to allow a free flow of discussion. There is certainly a limit to the number of students that can be involved in a free-flowing seminar discussion and this number is (I would say) right at the limit. A few mentioned either here or above the possibility of putting the book review and abstracts at a different time, either earlier or after Christmas. There might be some merit in both options.

5. Any other comments

A few welcome compliments and a call for the return of seminar tea!