

**NMD 251**  
**Electronic Music Composition II: Composing A Process**

Instructor: Nate Aldrich

nathaniel.aldrich@maine.edu

office hours: Thursdays, 11:30am – 12:30pm @ IMRC 112

Course materials are available for download at:

[www.nbaldrich.com/nmd251.html](http://www.nbaldrich.com/nmd251.html)

*This course runs in tandem with NMD 250. Though not co-requisites, students wishing to take NMD 251 without first taking NMD 250 need the approval of the instructor.*

A continuation of Electronic Music Composition I (NMD 250), this course offers an introduction to creating Electronic Music, and electronic art in general, in the form of a process rather than as a fixed object. From John Cage through Conceptualism, viewing art-making as “composing a process” is central to much contemporary art, particularly in New Media. Students will be introduced to the fundamentals the Max/MSP programming environment in the context of a creative forum where students will be expected to regularly produce and discuss work.

**How the grade is constructed:**

1. There will be three (3) quizzes over the course of the semester, as indicated on the syllabus. The content of each quiz will be culled from lectures, discussion and assignments to date. Each quiz is worth a possible ten (10) points, with a total of thirty (30) points possible. There will be no final exam.
2. Each student will submit four (4) Max/MSP patchers as indicated on the syllabus. These patchers can be responses to the tutorials or explorations of the Max/MSP universe and their content is solely up to the individual student. Each patcher is worth five (5) points with a possible total of twenty (20) points.
3. Each student is required to present three (3) pieces in class. A presentation consists of a) showing an original work created during the course of the semester and b) being prepared to discuss with the class the compositional goals of that work. Deadlines for the pieces are articulated in the syllabus. Each piece presented is worth a possible fifteen (15) points, with a total of forty five (45) points possible.
4. Each student is requested to actively participate in the classroom discussions that should serve as the adrenaline of the course. This participation along with other assignments as indicated on the syllabus, will contribute the final five (5) points to your grade. The instructor will be the final and sole arbiter in assigning these points.
5. The final grade will be constructed by adding the numbers together, then assigning the grade indicated by the total. Simple!

## **Tuesday Night at the IMRC:**

Students are expected to attend at least two (2) of our visiting artists series this semester and provide a 200 word reflection on the presentation. Failure to do so will be considered an absence and subject to the attendance policy below.

## **Deductions in grade points will be assigned for absences!**

Each student is conceded one (1) unexcused absence during the course of the semester. All other unexcused absences will result in a five (5) point deduction (example: If you miss 3 classes, you will have a total of 10 points deducted from the grade score as it is constructed by the points system above, thus an 87 (B+) would become a 77 (C+)).

*Please note: Any missed quizzes or assignments may or may not be made up, through late submission or alternate assignments, solely at the discretion of the instructor. Work not submitted will receive 0 points.*

## **About the class structure:**

We will be engaged in three parallel pursuits simultaneously in this class: 1) We will explore some relevant aspects of the history of Electronic Music; 2) We will explore several foundational compositional strategies and significant artists who employ them, as well as the schools of thought that motivate these artists; 3) We will avail ourselves to some of the basic techniques and technologies employed by electronic music composers, specifically Max/MSP. This will all then be manifest in your compositional thought and work.

## **About creating pieces for the class:**

Some weeks your assignment is to submit a Max patcher via e-mail to the instructor time-stamped before midnight of the **Tuesday before the class when due**. This patcher can be any Max patcher that you are interested in working on, including attempts to make something work that doesn't work or explorations of different tutorials or ideas. *If you request so in the e-mail*, the patcher will be returned to you with comments. Consider this assignment an opportunity to get feedback on your programming progress and/or ideas as well as a requirement to get the necessary repetitions in Max/MSP needed to acquire some expertise and understanding.

The work you create for presentation to the class is up to you, within the guiding requirements for each piece. Compositions need not specifically reflect any particular idea or technique presented in class, but should reflect your thinking as an Electronic Music/Art composer. The work must be presented as a Max/MSP patcher unless the instructor has specifically agreed to another format.

## **On electronic devices in the classroom:**

Due to an escalating potential for classroom disruption, the following is the current policy for this course:

"Be here now."

- Ram Dass

Please shut your phone off prior to class time. If your phone rings or if you are found using it, it will be confiscated for the duration of the class period. If this occurs more than once over the course of the semester, you will be marked as absent for that day.

If you are found to be using your laptop for *anything other than class notes*, and that includes doing your work for class during class or googling something we may be discussing, you will be asked to shut your computer off. If this occurs more than once over the course of the semester, you will be marked as absent that day.

If this somehow creates a hardship, please come speak to me.

### **Classroom Expectations:**

Students and instructors each play an important role in maintaining a classroom environment optimal for learning, and are expected to treat each other with respect. Class discussions require diverse opinions to be shared; please be thoughtful in sharing your perspectives and responses with one another.

Disruptive behavior is defined as any type of activity that would interrupt, in a negative manner, the normal flow of information exchange in the classroom or on the UMaine campus. Such conduct can not be tolerated as it interferes with the financial and educational investments of other students. Students that exhibit such unacceptable behavior will be asked to leave the classroom setting, and their future presence in the class will come under the review of an officer of the University.

Examples of inappropriate behavior include but are not limited to the following:

- verbal or physical abuse of another person
- sexual harassment or discrimination
- threats
- malicious destruction, damage or misuse of college property
- indecent or disorderly conduct.

Other behaviors that can be disruptive are chatting during class, preparing to leave before class is over, and/or consistently arriving late to class. The instructor will be the arbiter of what constitutes disruptive behavior.

### **Use of IMRC Studios, Labs and Other Facilities:**

You are encouraged to use the IMRC facilities to complete your work this semester. Access to the departmental facilities is a privilege. If there are problems - doors left unlocked, tools missing or damaged, trash everywhere, unsafe use of tools and materials - your access may be suspended.

**About the Electronic Music Studio:**

The Electronic Music Studio is a shared facility. There is technical support scheduled for the A/V suites at various times during the week. If you encounter a problem, please seek assistance. If you are working and no support is available, please do not attempt to address the problem.

Problems can and should be reported to:

imrcbooking@gmail.com

You may reserve a room in advance here:

<http://imrccenter.com/facilities/imrc-facilities-reservations/>

The Electronic Music Studio hours are:

available for viewing on the IMRC A/V production studio suite (rm 108) door.

**Textbook:**

As there is no textbook required for this class, however each student will be expected to purchase the Max/MSP student 12-month trial edition. It is available from:

<https://cycling74.com/shop?educational=1>

In the event of an extended disruption of normal classroom activities, the format for this course may be modified to enable its completion within its programmed time frame. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to the syllabus that will supersede this version.

**Academic Honesty:**

Standards of academic integrity are expected of all students. These require that students never present the work of others as their own. Nor should the same work be turned in for more than one class. Violations will result in failing the class and other disciplinary actions. Academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism and all forms of misrepresentation in academic work, and is unacceptable at The University of Maine. As stated in the University of Maine's online undergraduate "Student Handbook," plagiarism (the submission of another's work without appropriate attribution) and cheating are violations of The University of Maine Student Conduct Code.

**Students with a Disabling Condition:**

Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require special accommodations in order to meet course requirements should notify the instructor as soon as possible with appropriate documentation and meet with the instructor to clarify and arrange what is needed. If you have a disability for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Disabilities Services, 121 East Annex, 581-2319, as early as possible in the term.

**Religious Holy Days:**

If you expect to miss a class due to the observance of a religious holy day, you must inform the instructor, in writing, by the sixteenth day of the semester in order to make accommodations for exams or assignments.

**Sexual Discrimination Reporting:**

The University of Maine is committed to making campus a safe place for students. Because of this commitment, if you tell a teacher about an experience of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, relationship abuse (dating violence and domestic violence), sexual misconduct or any form of gender discrimination involving members of the campus, your teacher is required to report this information to the campus Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention or the Office of Equal Opportunity.

If you want to talk in confidence to someone about an experience of sexual discrimination, please contact these resources:

For confidential resources on campus:

Counseling Center: 207-581-1392 or

Cutler Health Center: at 207-581-4000

For confidential resources off campus:

Rape Response Services: 1-800-310-0000 or

Spruce Run: 1-800-863-9909.

Other resources: The resources listed below can offer support but may have to report the incident to others who can help:

For support services on campus: Office of Sexual Assault & Violence

Prevention: 207-581-1406

Office of Community Standards: 207-581-1409

University of Maine Police: 207-581-4040 or 911

*Or see the OSAVP website for a complete list of services at <http://www.umaine.edu/osavp/>*

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#### SYLLABUS:

1/25 **Introduction** – how this course will work; what's expected; readings; using the Electronic Music Studio; what is Electronic Music (or, perhaps, what is it not)?

2/1 **Phenomenological Listening** – a Cagean approach to understanding what you hear; a little bit of psychoacoustics.

*please read:* Phenomenological Listening (*download*)

2/8 **Conceptualizing a Process** – an introduction to digital audio and the Max/MSP environment.

*assignment:* write an aural observation

*please read:* Max tutorials 1 - 6

2/15 **Creating Sounds from Scratch** – basic synthesis: additive and AM; **1st quiz!**

*assignment:* a max patcher e-mailed to Nate by Sunday midnight

*please read:* MSP tutorials 1,2, 8 & 9 (you may also want to *download* the .pdf titled Synthesis Fundamentals)

2/22 **Student Compositions #1** – **1st compositions due!** This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing our first compositions.

*assignment:* make a patcher in Max/MSP that includes audio synthesis.

3/1 **Instrument Design** – designing an interface and control structure.

*assignment:* a max patcher e-mailed to Nate by Sunday midnight

*please read:* Inputs and Controls *and* Instrument Design (*download*) and Max Tutorials 7 & 8

3/8 **Audio Playback** – playing audio files and filling buffers with audio information; **2nd quiz!**

*assignment:* a max patcher e-mailed to Nate by Sunday midnight  
*please read:* MSP tutorials 13, 14 & 16

3/15 **SPRING BREAK!**

3/22 **Student Compositions #2 – 2nd compositions due!** This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing our second compositions.

*assignment:* make an instrument with a user controlled interface

3/29 **Student Compositions #2 continued** – This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing our second compositions.

4/5 **A Little Bit about Interactive Art** - We will examine the idea of interactivity as it applies to Art!

*assignment:* a max patcher e-mailed to Nate by Sunday midnight

4/12 **Student Lead Forum** – an opportunity for students to bring questions, comments and discoveries to class for our collective scrutiny.

4/19 **Student Compositions #3 – 3rd and final compositions due!** This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing our final compositions.

*assignment:* make a piece that is either automata or interactive

4/26 **Student Compositions #3 continued** – This class will be dedicated to listening to and discussing our final compositions.

5/3 **Summing Up** – what is Electronic Music (revisited)?; **3rd and final quiz!**