

MUS 507: Studies in Music History – Proseminar in Baroque Music

Instructor: Erika Honisch | Tuesday, 3:30pm – 6:20pm

First deployed as an epithet by a critic disturbed by the music of Jean-Philippe Rameau, the music-stylistic label “Baroque” is now used to describe a vast range of musical styles, practices, and genres cultivated in Europe and its colonies from around 1600 to 1750. But what was Baroque music? What do Monteverdi’s jittery songs of love and war from 1630s Venice have in common with the sprightly keyboard sonatas Domenico Scarlatti wrote for a Portuguese princess; what do Buxtehude’s reflective meditations on the limbs of a suffering Jesus, written for Lübeck in 1700, have in common with Handel’s splashy Water Music? This course makes no attempt to discipline the unruly polystylism of the music we now refer to as “Baroque”; rather, we will plunge deep into its thickets, gaining footholds with weekly listening, and using a combination of primary sources and recent research to build our pathways. Topics covered include Baroque concepts of emotion, the limits of notation, emergent forms, dance trends circa 1690, basso continuo possibilities, sound effects, the music of colonization, and only the best ground bass patterns. Course requirements include weekly readings and listening; weekly written assignments; and in-class presentations. Attendance and engaged participation in discussion is mandatory.

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