

CLASSICAL MUSIC IN AN AGE OF POP

Spring 2021

Greg Sandow

phone: 917 797-4265

[email me](#)

[my website](#)

[my blog on the future of classical music](#)

[find me on Facebook](#)

[find me on Twitter](#)

[website for this course, with week by week schedule, and links to all assignments](#)

(revised 1/25/21)

Why this course?

This course looks at the future of classical music. How things are changing, why they're changing, and what you can do as things continue to change — what your challenges are, and your opportunities.

Most of us, I'm sure, are aware of the changes. There's a new emphasis on bringing classical music out of the concert hall and the opera house, and into the community. Many performances are more informal than performances used to be. We talk to our audience. Some of us perform the great masterworks in new ways, and find ways to combine classical music with other musical styles, including pop.

And there's an emphasis on entrepreneurship, on classical musicians making their careers in their own way, sometimes in new ways.

Why are things changing? It's easy to say. Classical music has been in a crisis for quite a few years. If you want to know how long the crisis has been going on, one way to measure it is by how long I've been teaching this course — for 24 years, ever since 1997. So way back in 1997, there was already a feeling that classical music was having trouble.

And the trouble is easy to define. Though first I want to note that much of what I'm saying here, and much of what we do in the course, is focused on how things are in the U.S. From what I've seen when I've traveled or worked with people in other countries — largely Europe, Britain, and Australia — and what I've heard from students from other countries who've taken this course, I think things are pretty similar elsewhere in the world. Except possibly in Asia! Since there are many Asian students in this class, I want to say that I know less about classical music in Asia than I do about how it's doing in other places. So I'll be very interested to hear from those of you who are from Asia — and any country besides the U.S. — about how things are where you're from.

So here are the problems that people in the U.S. talk about. The classical music audience has gotten older. Fewer tickets are being sold for classical music performances. Classical music institutions, like orchestras and opera companies, have had serious financial problems. Which would make sense, if they're losing some of their income from ticket sales. Many classical music institutions have had to cut their musicians' pay.

And there's been a growing sense — for all the time I've been teaching this course — that classical music is losing its relevance in our world. Fewer people listen to it, fewer people care about it.

Was it always like this? Not at all. If you go back many decades, and look at how classical music was then, you'll think you're in another universe. The audience was young, and classical music was an active part of mainstream culture. It was widely broadcast on the radio, and even shown on commercial TV. There wasn't any crisis. Classical music institutions could count on selling tickets without any marketing. Their audience simply came to concerts, year after year.

It's not like that now. And the pandemic, of course, has made the crisis even worse. Even the biggest institutions, like the New York Philharmonic and the Met Opera, have cancelled their seasons, losing millions of dollars in ticket income, on top of what they were losing from the long-term decline in ticket sales. That makes their finances even worse than they were before. Many of them feel they have to cut their musicians' pay even more than they have in the past.

We don't know yet how classical music will recover from these problems. But here's some hope. In the midst of all the trouble, there are new opportunities for classical musicians. If you want to do something new with your music — even something not taught or done at Juilliard! — you can do it. You'll find that other musicians may be doing the same thing, and that there's support for all of you. Or you may find that you're the first to do something new and wonderful, and that the classical music world — and also a new audience — is responding to it, paying attention to you, getting excited about what you do.

So the classical music world may be changing, and the existing audience might be fading away. The pandemic has made things worse. These are problems. But in a changing world, you might have a chance to live your dreams.

Course outline

Here are the main topics we'll discuss in this course:

The crisis in classical music: How bad is it? Will the audience disappear? Will classical music institutions go out of business? What caused the crisis? How wide is the gap between classical music and the rest of our culture? How will classical music recover from the loss of performances and loss of income due to the pandemic?

What classical music is: If we want to save classical music, we need to know why it should be saved. It's not enough just to say that we love it. Why do we love it? What can it contribute to our world? Why should people who don't now listen to classical music give it a chance?

Classical music in the past: Classical music wasn't always as formal as it is now. In past centuries, classical musicians improvised. And — to judge from written reports, and from early recordings — they played with winning individuality. The audience, as I've said, was younger than we see today. And it was a lively audience. In Mozart's time, people applauded — during the music! — the moment they heard something they liked. What can we learn from all of this? Could classical music ever be this free again? Would we want it to be?

Pop music: As we all know, pop music is everywhere, in everyone's lives, defining what they think music is. It's the ruling music of our time. So what's its relationship to classical music? Is pop music only entertainment, or can it be another kind of art? And if it can be art, why do people need classical music?

Fixing the crisis:

Changes: As I've said, the classical music world is exploding with change. We'll look at some of the changes, at some of the things that people have done to make

classical music new again, to reach out to the community, and to find a new audience.

Diversity: In the midst of change, both in classical music and in the wider world, diversity presents a huge challenge. Or at least it does in the U.S. and in Britain, two multicultural societies in which the people involved in classical music (and especially those who run classical music institutions) have been largely White. Lately there have been many Asians coming into the field, which is a definite change. But one thing remains the same. The composers we perform are almost entirely White and European – and male. Does this have to change? The answer coming from within the classical music field, at least in the U.S., is a very definite “yes.” Classical music groups of all sizes, from the biggest orchestras to the smallest ensembles, are playing more music by women. And they’re making plans to bring more people of color into classical music, both onstage and in the audience. We’ll look at some of those plans, and try to judge how well they’re working.

Entrepreneurship: In the midst of crisis and change, what can you do for yourselves, as students and in your professional careers? Can you help find a new audience for yourself, and for classical music? We’ll talk about entrepreneurial ways of doing that. And we’ll end the course with a look at ways for all of you to create your own brand. Branding is important in today’s world, but it’s not just for big corporations, not just for Coca-Cola and Apple. It’s how we identify all the products and services we buy, including those the arts. For all of you, branding can be a way to help you build your careers, especially if you build it in new, entrepreneurial ways. You all have your own unique and deeply personal approach to making music. If you can tell the world what that is, you can make people care about the music you make.

You’ll see that I have ideas, sometimes strong ones, about what we’ll talk about in this course. And I’m sure you have ideas of your own. If your ideas are different from mine, feel free to disagree with me. Nobody knows all the answers. And all of us, in our different ways, are working toward a future in which we hope classical music can thrive.

Assignments (full details online, at the [course web page](#)):

This is a course in questions, not answers, so the most important part of our work will be the discussions we’ll have in our Zoom classes.

But of course you’ll have things to read, music to listen to, and videos to watch, all related to the topics we’ll discuss.

After each class, you’ll have a short assignment, in which I’ll ask you to write something about things we discussed in class. You’ll also have two informal short papers to write. One is about why you think classical music is valuable, and in the other, you’ll plan a concert to appeal to people who don’t normally go to classical performances. You’ll submit all these assignments – the short ones after every class, and the two papers – on Canvas.

And you’ll make one presentation in class, toward the end of the course. In this presentation, you’ll take a step toward branding yourselves, by presenting words and images that in some way show what you’re like as a musician.

How you’re graded:

As I’ve said, the most important part of this course is what happens in our Zoom classes. I often present things there that aren’t in your reading assignments. And beyond that, in our class discussions all of us (including me) can work out our thoughts on the issues we’ll confront.

To me, this is the most crucial thing we do. So a large part of your grade will be based on class participation, though the papers and short assignments also count. I won't grade the presentation, because it's very personal, and also because in my experience almost everyone does it well.

For asynchronous students:

Each week, you'll watch a recording of the class. I'll email a link to you each Wednesday afternoon, at some point after the class finishes. The exact time I email the link will depend on when Zoom tells me the link is ready, and also on my own schedule that day. You can also find links to the recordings on the [Canvas home page](#) for the course.

I'll also try to work out a separate Zoom session each week for asynchronous students, at a time we'll arrange. If there's more than one asynchronous student, I'll want to Zoom with all of you at once.

I have two reasons for wanting to Zoom with you privately. First, so you can participate in the class more directly than only by watching a recording. And, second, I may want to record our sessions, and — with your permission — play some of our conversation for the synchronous students, during our regular classes. This is so they can get to know you a little, and so that your participation in the class has some reality for them. I'll also look for other ways to bring you and the synchronous students together, but I don't yet know what those will be.

Juilliard says asynchronous students should expect to be assigned extra work in the course, and I may do that.

One more thing. If any asynchronous student has ideas about how they can take part more in class, I'd be happy to hear them! This is something we're all learning how to do, and I hardly have all the answers.

Juilliard's attendance policy (short version):

You'll find Juilliard's official attendance policy at the end of this overview. When you read it, you'll see that there are two kinds of absences from class. An unexcused absence is when you just don't show up. And an excused absence is when you tell me why you can't be in class, and I say it's OK. Or when you miss class because you have professional leave, approved by me and by the school. Note that absences because of lessons or coaching sessions are considered unexcused.

The policy says that if you have more than two unexcused absences, your grade should be lowered. You can find further details in Juilliard's document. If you're having trouble of some kind that makes it difficult for you to come to class, please reach out to me, and we'll see what can be done.

If you're given excused absences, I may want to assign you extra work to make up for classes you miss.

One last word:

I want this course to be fun. I'll try to surprise you with some of assignments, and with music I might play in class.

And if past years are any guide, our class discussions might surprise all of us. Nothing is off limits, and no opinions are sacred, including my own.

More on Juilliard policies:

I'm required to include these, exactly as they appear in a Juilliard official document:

Policies and Additional Information (revised, spring semester, 2021)

Adding and Dropping Classes. The schedule to drop a course without it appearing in your transcript or to request a withdrawal is listed below. For the complete policy regarding “dropping classes,” see [Schedule Changes](#) in the online catalog.

	Add/Drop Deadline	Withdrawal Deadline
Courses starting on January 11	Wednesday, January 20	Friday, February 19
Courses starting on March 1	Wednesday, March 10	Friday, April 9

Attendance. Juilliard’s Attendance Policy for Academic Courses (see below) will be applied and enforced in an online environment according to the following parameters:

1. *All students are expected to join class sessions synchronously.* Students must log in to the session on time and remain for the duration of the session to be considered in attendance.
 - a. The video function on Zoom is expected to remain on unless the student has made prior arrangements with the instructor. Faculty reserve the right to mark absent any student who turns off their video without first seeking permission to do so. (Please refer to the [Online Learning Environment Expectations](#) for more information.)
2. Asynchronous participation is available to students for whom circumstances—including drastically different time zones—make real-time participation impracticable.
 - a. *Students must request permission from the instructor to attend the course asynchronously.* Requests must be made in writing no later than the add/drop deadline for that course. Requests to attend asynchronously after this date will only be honored under extenuating circumstances.
 - b. Students participating asynchronously should expect to be assigned additional coursework to demonstrate their active engagement in the course and verify their attendance.
 - c. Students whose circumstances change during the semester such that they may join the class synchronously may do so. Once allowed to participate synchronously, students are subject to the same attendance policy as those who have attended synchronously from the start.
3. Each class session is to be recorded *by the instructor and for educational purposes only* and made available on Canvas for those students unable to join in real time. Students are reminded that Part II, Section 7, of the Juilliard [Student Code of Conduct](#) prohibits recording classes—including screenshots and audio content or posting course materials online—under any circumstances.
4. For academic courses, attendance will be factored into a student’s final grade according to the policies published in the Juilliard Attendance Policy for Academic Courses, as outlined below. For non-academic coursework, please refer to the course syllabus and divisional/departmental policies on attendance and grading.

Juilliard Attendance Policy for Academic Courses. In each semester, grades in courses meeting 1 time per week will be lowered to the next grade level (i.e., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) with **each unexcused absence after the second**, and grades in courses meeting 2 or more times per week will be lowered to the next grade level (i.e., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) with **each unexcused absence after the third**. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Any student who arrives after attendance is taken will be marked "late." Three late arrivals to class or early departures from class constitute one unexcused absence.

Absences. Absences incurred in observance of a religious holiday not officially recognized by the School may be excused. Students who intend to take an excused absence in observance of a holiday must inform their instructor at the start of the semester of their intention to do so and be prepared to make up any assignments or work missed as a result of the absence. Scheduled due dates for coursework must be honored even where the absence has been excused.

Students feeling unwell or experiencing any COVID-related symptoms (including but not limited to coughing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, sore throat, or loss of sense of taste or smell) should not attend class or any other activity in person, even if the symptoms are mild. They should notify their instructor as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for completing assignments.

Academic Integrity Policy. Academic integrity is a core value that ensures respect for the academic reputation of The Juilliard School, its students, faculty and staff, and the degrees it confers. Juilliard expects that students will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and respect the intellectual work of others. Students are required to adhere to the policies listed in the catalog under [Academic Policies](#).

Academic Support and Accessibility Services. The Office of Academic Support and Disability Services ([OASDS](#)) offers tutoring for students (in collaboration with Academic Affairs and the appropriate department) and disability support services to students with qualified disabilities.

Academic Support. Students in need of tutoring should inquire with their instructor, department head, OASDS, or Academic Affairs. For Liberal Arts courses and many music courses, tutoring is available through the [Writing and Communication Center](#). Tutoring in other areas may be arranged within each department. For cases of special tutoring, students will be required to submit a completed Tutorial Contract request form signed by an instructor or department head. The Tutorial Contract request form is available via OASDS. Students receiving special tutoring may need to pay a reasonable rate out-of-pocket unless a financial or documented disability-related need is determined, in which case, The Juilliard School will cover the cost. Please reach out to OASDS or Academic Affairs for further details.

Disability Services. The Juilliard School is committed to providing access and the opportunity to participate on an equal basis in Juilliard's educational programs. OASDS offers support to students with temporary or permanent disabilities, including medical, mental, emotional, or physical health-related issues, and other functional barriers. If you need disability accommodations, please contact OASDS by emailing oasds@juilliard.edu, call 212-799-5000 Ex. 320, or visit OASDS in suite 245B.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging (EDIB). Juilliard is committed to the diversity of the School community and strives to foster an environment that is inclusive, supportive, and welcoming to all. This means working actively and intentionally to deepen the dialogue on equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EDIB) and address the institutional structures of systemic injustice that shape the performing arts industry. This central [commitment](#) to EDIB is essential to delivering on Juilliard's mission to provide the highest caliber of artistic education to students and shape the future of the performing arts.

Statement of Non-Discrimination. The Juilliard School does not discriminate, or tolerate discrimination, on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic protected by law (collectively, "Protected Classes") in its educational programs and activities, admissions, or employment, as required by Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the New York State Education Law, the New York State Human Rights Law, and other applicable laws and school policies.

Non-Discrimination and Harassment Policy. Juilliard's [Non-Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#) offers a range of reporting and resolution options for community members and is an essential element of the School's [EDIB](#) initiatives. More information about the policy, including how to report, is available [here](#).

Sexual Misconduct Policy. Juilliard's [Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) is a comprehensive resource that includes information about support services, reporting, rights, and response procedures. For more information about [Title IX](#), [contact](#) the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. *Please note that faculty and staff, except for Health and Counseling Services staff, are required to notify the Title IX Coordinator of any allegations of sexual misconduct.*