

JAPAN 4740 Japanese Soundscapes

Fall 2023 | TTh, 2:00–3:20pm | BEH S 111

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Office hours (LNCO 1325): TTh, 10–11 am, or by appointment

Course Description

This course explores a range of acoustic environments in, of, and related to Japan, past and present. Through close reading and attentive listening, we will consider how sound relates to sociality in a variety of contexts, from medieval tales performed by itinerant monks and nuns to immersive listening in our post-Walkman world. Topics include adaptations of ancient court music, soundscapes of traditional festivals, politics and nostalgia in popular song, noise pollution and acoustic conservation, ludomusicology, and the relationship between sound and language. While we will spend a lot of time listening to, reading about, and discussing music, our goal is to learn how to think critically about a broader range of acoustic practices. All materials in English and course taught in English.

Between Reading and Listening

Coursework will consist of two primary modes of attention: reading and listening. Some classes will focus on text, some will focus on listening assignments, and some will focus on a combination. I encourage you to approach each with the same focus and openness. In the humanities we generally spend a lot of time talking and teaching about reading: how to assimilate information, how to take notes, how to read actively. Critical listening, on the other hand, may be entirely new to you and it might take you some time to get comfortable thinking about sound. This is perfectly fine. All I ask is that you approach whatever is unfamiliar with an open mind. Try listening with and without headphones, in the morning and at night. Consider how the sounds you're listening to are structured and how you make sense of them. Use past readings to elucidate possible meanings and interpretations. Always take notes and always timestamp!

Course Goals

- Expand your knowledge of the history of sound and music in Japan and beyond
- Become a more critical and discerning listener
- Engage proficiently with Japanese culture across a range of different media
- Improve as a writer of both casual and formal analysis

Course Materials

Readings consist mostly of essays and book chapters. You do not need to purchase any books, but you will need to prepare the materials for active reading (print them out, use a tablet, etc.).