DISTINGUISHED LECTURE IN MUSIC THEORY

Beethoven's March to the Dark Side: Empirical and Analytical Approaches to 'Cinematic' Listening of Early-Nineteenth-Century Marches

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Tuesday, November 19th, 2019
12:45pm
103 Music Practice Building
Free and open to the public.

BIO

Janet Bourne is an Assistant Professor of Music Theory at the University of California, Santa Barbara and founder of the UC Santa Barbara Music Cognition Lab. She has presented at multiple regional, national, and international conferences including the Society for Music Theory and International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition. She has publications in *Music Theory Online*, the *Norton Guide to Teaching Music Theory*, *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, and *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy*, among others. She is interested in the cognition behind listening and musical communication, modes of listening, musical analogy and categorization, schema theory, topic theory, connections between music and language, representations of gender and race in film music, and music theory pedagogy. Her current book project, tentatively titled *Beethoven Speaks, Who Listens? Experience, Cognition, and Meaning,* describes a cognitively-based framework for analyzing music from the perspective of different listeners and various modes of listening.

ABSTRACT:

When a modern listener goes to a concert and hears Beethoven's Op. 26, what images come to mind? While some scholars (Allanbook 1983) assume modern listeners recognize early nineteenth-century topics, others remain skeptical (Clarke 2005). I argue that certain 21st-century listeners narratively engage with musical topics using associations inspired by film and multimedia, even when listening to Western art music, implying a "cinematic" mode of listening. This talk has two parts: 1) I discuss a psychological experiment I ran that tests whether listeners narratively engage with march and pastoral topics, and 2) I use results from this experiment to inform narrative analyses of Beethoven's Op. 26/III. One result of the experiment was that people imagined narratives significantly more often when listening to march topics compared to pastorals. A computerized language analysis technique called the Meaning Extraction Method (Boyd 2017) was used to analyze peoples' written narratives, statistically grouping frequent words into common themes. Most people reported themes inspired by film, implying they used a "cinematic" mode of listening. Using the associations mentioned in the experiment, I create narrative analyses of Beethoven's Op. 26/iii. I argue for two narrative analyses: one from a historically-informed listener perspective and one from a modern listener perspective (who hears Beethoven's music "cinematically"). This cognitively-based, interdisciplinary project takes seriously the role of the listener in analysis. This talk also reconstructs modern listening approaches—since sometimes the concert hall cannot escape the movie theater.

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