

## FU/BEST Program

**Name:** Dr. Tom Rojo Poller  
**Email address:** fubest@fu-berlin.de  
**Course title:** Music in the Digital Age  
**Course number:** FU-BEST 29  
**Language of instruction:** English  
**Contact hours:** 45  
**ECTS-Credits:** 5    **U.S. semester credits:** 3

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### Course description

There is hardly any musical style, genre or context that has not been significantly affected by the pervasive digitalization of recent decades. From digital audio workstations to computer-generated music, from laptop performances to fan remixes, from cloud computing to commercial distribution channels – digital technology has profoundly changed the ways in which music is produced, performed, disseminated and consumed. In this course, we will examine the nature of these shifts and sample salient and productive intersections of music and technology. Through specific case studies, we will tackle the following questions: How have digital technologies enabled unprecedented modes of making, using and perceiving music? In what ways has digital mediatization shaped our experiences with musical content and style? And how do we reconcile the long-established connections between music, performance and liveness in an era when the paradigm of reproduction seems to be omnipresent?

In the first five sessions, we will consider the impact of digital technologies on the production of music. After an introducing outline of basic shifts in music and musicianship caused by digitalization and the computer, we will look at concrete musical examples in order to understand the influence of digital technologies both on the creative process of music making and on the aesthetic reflection on it.

The second half of the course will start with exemplary examinations of digital music technologies in music-related genres and domains, such as film, video games or sound art.

At the end of the semester, we will extend the scope and consider cultural issues that arise by digital possibilities of sharing, disseminating and consuming music. In

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particular, we will discuss the intertwining of digitization and commodification as well as its impact on the experience of music in everyday life.

### Student profile

Second-semester sophomore or above

### Prerequisites

None

### Course Requirements

Midterm exam: 25%

Term-Paper: 25%

Final exam: 25%

Class participation (includes 1 Independent Project report): 25%

### Literature

Photocopied course reader with texts drawn from scholarly sources.

### Course schedule

| Sessions  | Topics, Readings, etc.   |
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| Session 1 | <p><b>Introduction; overview of the course</b><br/> <b>Transformations of musicianship in the digital age</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Andrew Hugill, <i>The Digital Musician</i> (2012), pages 221-257.</p>   |
| Session 2 | <p><b>General outlines and a short history of Computer Music</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Thom Holmes: <i>Electronic and Experimental Music</i> (2012), pages 271-320.</p> <p>Chapter 1 and 2 from <i>The Oxford Handbook of Computer Music</i> (2009)</p> |
| Session 3 | <p><b>The impact of digital technology on music production I – Digital signatures in popular music sound</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Chapters 1, 7 and 8 from Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen/Anne Danielsen, <i>Digital Signatures</i> (2016)</p>                |

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| <p><b>Session 4</b></p> | <p><b>The impact of digital technology on music production II – Digital aesthetics</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen/Paul Harkins, “Contextual incongruity and musical congruity: the aesthetics and humour of mash-ups” from <i>Popular Music</i> (2012), Vol. 31/1</p> <p>DJ Spooky, “In Through the Out Door: Sampling and the Creative Act”, from: <i>Sound Unbound</i> (2008)</p> <p>Kim Cascone, “The Aesthetics of Failure: ‘Post-Digital’ Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music”, from <i>Computer Music Journal</i> (2000), Vol. 24/4</p> |
| <p><b>Session 5</b></p> | <p><b>The impact of digital technology on music production III – DJ and laptop performances</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Introduction and chapter 4 from Mark J. Butler, <i>Playing with Something that Runs</i> (2014)</p>   |
| <p><b>Session 6</b></p> | <p><b>Midterm Exam</b></p>  |
| <p><b>Session 7</b></p> | <p><b>Liveness in the digital age</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Paul Sanden, <i>Liveness in Modern Music</i> (2013), pages 1-43.</p> <p>Paul Sanden, “Virtual liveness and sounding cyborgs: John Oswald’s ‘Vane’” from <i>Popular Music</i> (2012), Vol. 31/1</p> <p>J. Mulder, “Live sound and the disappearing digital” from Angela Cresswell Jones/Rebecca Jane Bennett, <i>The Digital Evolution of Live Music</i> (2015)</p>   |
| <p><b>Session 8</b></p> | <p><b>Digital extensions of music</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Nicola Dibben, “Visualizing the App Album with Björk’s Biophilia” from <i>The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media</i> (2013), pages 682-706.</p>   |

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|                   | <p>Hoesen/Perrotte, "Sound Art: New Only in Name" from Feiereisen/Hills, <i>Germany in the Loud Twentieth Century</i> (2011), pages 141-154.</p> <p>"First" from Paul Hegarty, <i>Noise/Music: A History</i> (2007)</p>  |
| <b>Session 9</b>  | <p><b>Digital technology in film and video games</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> "Music and Film Sound Today" from Buhler/Neumeyer/Deemer, <i>Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History</i> (2009)</p> <p>Whittington, "Lost in Sensation: Reevaluating the Role of Cinematic Sound in the Digital Age" in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media</i> (2013), pages 61-76.</p> <p>Kiri Miller, "Virtual and Visceral Experience in Music-Oriented Video Games" in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media</i> (2013), pages 518-533.</p> <p>Introduction from Michael Austin, <i>Music Video Games</i> (2016), pages 1-20.</p> |
| <b>Session 10</b> | <p><b>From sampling to remix culture</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Kembrew McLead, "An Oral History of Sampling – From Turntables to Mashups" from <i>The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies</i> (2015)</p> <p>Excerpts from Eduardo Navas, <i>Remix Theory – The Aesthetics of Sampling</i> (2012)</p>   |
| <b>Session 11</b> | <p><b>Copyright and sharing music in the digital age</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Daphne Keller, "The Musician as Thief: Digital Culture and Copyright Law" from <i>Sound Unbound</i> (2008)</p>   |

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|                   | <p>Excerpts from Matthew David, <i>Peer to Peer and the Music Industry: The Criminalization of Sharing</i> (2010)</p> <p>Chapter 5 from Peter Wikström, <i>The Music Industry: Music in the Cloud</i> (2013)</p>  |
| <b>Session 12</b> | <p><b>Music in the cloud</b></p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Introduction and Chapter 5 from Jeremy Wade Morris, <i>Selling Digital Music – Formatting Culture</i> (2015)</p> <p>Chapter 5 from Peter Wikström, <i>The Music Industry: Music in the Cloud</i> (2013)</p> |
| <b>Session 13</b> | <b>Final Exam</b>   |