

## Syllabus of Record

**Program:** CET Prague

**Course Code / Title:** CLTR 265 Czech Sounds: Music and Culture

**Total Hours:** 45

**Recommended Credits:** 3

**Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings:** Cultural Studies / History, Central European Studies, Anthropology

**Language of Instruction:** English

**Prerequisites / Requirements:** None

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### Description

The course will acquaint students with contemporary Czech culture and art, their “roots” and transformations from three different perspectives. First, the course will pursue how Czech culture and music are connected with activism, minority groups and mainstream culture. Second, focus will be placed on how to “read” and decode contemporary urban performances, literature and music from a semiotic perspective (i.e. art as social life). Third, the course will provide (a safe, inspiring) space and enable one’s creative self-development within an immersive context. Field trips, workshops, concerts, and listening sessions will be offered, with the help of some of the most talented, well-known, and awarded artists living in the Czech Republic.

### Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students will:

- Acquire both theoretical and practical tools and experience to approach texts, sounds, and performances, while developing their awareness about how these affect contemporary Czech society.
- Be able to provide an overview of contemporary theoretical debates and their historical development, including performance theory and postmodern theory of subjectivity, music and cultural identities in the Central European context.
- Experience the learning of a literary and musical style and creation of various types of texts.
- Develop an understanding of how other writers and artists of note have met challenges and either overcome them or not (Czech writers, thinkers and composers including Franz Kafka, Michal Ajvaz, Aid Kid, and Toybox).
- Understand contemporary Czech music and culture.

### Requirements

Active participation is essential in this course. This course includes in-class lectures, field trips, guest lectures and workshops. Students are expected to attend each class and field study course component as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Students are expected to prepare all assigned materials before the relevant class session and come prepared to participate thoughtfully

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in class discussions. Reading assignments are generally about 30 pages per class session. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Graded assignments include:

- **Text and Music Analyses:** Students will discuss assigned readings and produce two analyses of different genres (2-3 pages each) of authors such as Franz Kafka, K. Rudčenková, Katarzia, K. Tučková, etc.
- **In-Class/Studio Exercises:** Students will create 1 short text, or audio-visual work reflecting one of the following themes: 1) their study-abroad experience and changes in their perceptions, culture shock, non-verbal language of Czechs, 2) collecting/recording sounds and words in Prague, coming from the urban and natural landscape and our workshops, creating a composition, or 3) magical realism and surrealism - giving a voice to an animal, a river, a tree, following Kafka, Ajvaz, or Tučková. The non-human author can perceive the same challenges as us (i.e. global warming, water scarcity, threat of war, but also empathy). The form can be a text, musical piece, or an audio-visual short project.
- **Reading Presentation:** Students prepare a 10-minute presentation, with 5 minutes afterwards for questions. Presentations will employ elements of the local context to illustrate concepts discussed in an assigned reading.
- **Final Project and In-class Presentation:** The final project will consist of either: an extensive written text (8-10 pages, including at least 4 secondary sources/articles, exploring a narrow theme or subject discussed in class), or a multimedia (2-3 minutes long) composition on a topic of the student's choosing. The text or multimedia piece will be assessed in a two-stage process: 1) written 2-page explanation what the project will be about, and 2) final draft/form of the project, submitted during weeks 10 and 12. During the in-class presentation, the student is expected to describe (and show or play) the project to the class participants in approximately 10 minutes, with 5 minutes afterwards for discussion.

## Grading

The final grade is determined as follows:

- Class Participation (*see rubric below*) 20%
- Text and Music Analyses (2 at 10%) 20%
- In-Class/Studio Exercises (2 at 10%) 20%
- Reading Presentation 10%
- Final Project and Presentation 30%
  - Written explanation: 5%
  - Final draft: 15%
  - Presentation: 10%

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### Class Participation Grading Rubric

	<b>A – 90-100% Exemplary</b>	<b>B – 80-89% Proficient</b>	<b>C – 70-79% Developing</b>	<b>D – 60-69% Unacceptable</b>	<b>F – 0-59% Missing</b>
<b>Frequency of class participation</b>	Actively contributes 2+ times per meeting	Actively contributes at least 1 time per meeting	Actively contributes at least half of the time during term	Actively contributes less than half of the time during term	Does not contribute
<b>Quality of class participation*</b>	Contribution is always thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, frequently interacting with peers	Contribution is mostly thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, usually interacting with peers	Contribution is somewhat thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, sometimes interacting with peers	Contribution is rarely thoughtful, accurate, and constructive, rarely interacting with peers	Does not contribute or interact with peers
<b>Level of class preparation</b>	Always fully prepared and on task	Mostly prepared and on task	Somewhat prepared and on task	Rarely prepared and on task	Consistently unprepared and not on task

### Readings / Resources

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972.

Becker, Konrad. "Critical Intelligence in Art and Digital Media." In: *A Companion to Digital Media*. Wiley, 2016.

Benjamin, Walter. "The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical reproduction." In *Illuminations*. Schocken, 2008.

Hodrova, Daniela. "I see a great city." In: *Prague: A Traveler's Literary Companion*. San Francisco : Whereabouts Press, 1995.

Kafka, Franz. *Metamorphosis*. Sirium, 2023.

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Maderová, B., Jurková, Z., Veselý, K. *Dotknout se světa/To touch the world: Česká hudební alternativa 1968–2013 / Czech musical alternative 1968-2013*. Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague, 2013.

Morganová, Pavlína. *Czech Action Art: Happenings, Actions, Events, Land Art, Body Art and Performance Art Behind the Iron Curtain*. Praha: Karolinum Press, 2014.

Slačálek, O., Oravcová, A. “Roma youth in Czech rap music: stereotypes, objectification and ‘triple inauthenticity.’” *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2020, Vol. 23, NO. 7, 926–944.

Tučková, Kateřina. *The Last Goddess: A Novel*. Amazon Crossings, 2022.

Toyen, Štýrský. “The Poet” (A Lecture). In: *Between Two Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930*. The MIT Press. Cambridge, MA: 2002.

Turino, Thomas. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Vijay Iyer. “Improvisation, Action Understanding, and Music Cognition With and Without Bodies.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*, edited by George E. Lewis and Benjamin Piekut. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Zahrádka, P. David, I., Leška, R., Krša, M. “Copyright and the Ethics of Sampling Copyright and the Ethics of Sampling: The Lesson of the Czech Music Scene.” In: *Popular Music and Society*, 2025, VOL. 48, NO. 2, 169–193.

## Content

Topic 1 – Introduction into the Contemporary Czech music scene

- Discussion of class format and expectations
- Czech attitudes, cultural specificities, mythologies
- Czech music and the role of improvisation and stream of consciousness
- Experiencing the flow vs. academic content analysis of music performances and lyrics

Topic 2 – The Czech Surrealism in lyrics and literature

- Franz Kafka and his surreal, existential landscapes
- Contemporary surrealism in Tučková’s novels
- Discussion of Czech magical realist features

Topic 3 – Voices from the Periphery vs. Mainstream Media

- Romani culture and current soundscapes
- Experiencing a Romani concert “live” in the classroom
- Authenticity, Roma identities, and stereotypes in Czech hip hop

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### Topic 4 – Literary and Music Forms. Concepts of Identity and Community in Czech lands

- Exploring the theory of Thomas Turino based on music as social life
- Meeting Central European artists in the Recording studio
- Methods of field work in the Czech context

### Topic 5 – Gender, Ethnicity and Intersectionality in Contemporary Music and Audio-visual Art

- Post-structuralist theories of gender, ethnicity and intersectionality
- The connection of Performance art and Music before and after communism
- Growing presence of women in Czech hip hop and electronic music
- Vietnamese-Czech contemporary music and the challenges it encounters in Czech society

### Topic 6 – New Media, Sampling and Copying in Music

- The questions of authorship and copyright in Czech electronic music
- The theory of Walter Benjamin - on mechanical reproduction
- Discussing new technologies, the use of AI in music and art, and the limitations and benefits of owning a human body

### Topic 7 – Digital media

- What are digital media contents and forms in contemporary Central European Culture
- Overcoming nature vs. nurture dualities
- Eco-scapes, fragility, and silence in recent Czech acoustic music

### Topic 8 – Czech surrealist comeback

- The classics - Toyen, Štýrský and their manifestos
- Surrealism in current Czech literature - the case of Hodrová
- Surrealist or magical Prague - The city as a text and sound to be decoded.
- the surreal in Czech song-lyrics and visuals

### Topic 9 – Contemporary Czech electronic music

- Field trip to the recording studio and exploration of the vintage vs. digital recording techniques
- new technologies and mixing of genres in Czech electro music
- combining the sound and image - overcoming the limits of everyday perception and traditional identity formation.

*Syllabus of Record is subject to minor changes in Term-specific Syllabus at faculty's discretion.*