

MUSIC 501 - What Makes Music Last?

Fall 2025 M 2:00-4:50 pm

Instructor: Dr Fabio Morabito

This class is open to all students across the University of Alberta. There is **no prerequisite** and as such it *doesn't require any previous knowledge* for you to take it.

Topics include:

- how and why musicians in Euro-colonial environments presented/continue to present lasting images of themselves to the public;
- fan-culture;
- music and art "as monuments" of a culture;
- the fascination with the bodies (dead or alive) of musicians or with objects a musician owned and used;
- the origins of celebrity culture;
- theories of genius and charisma;
- and how often our ideas of musical "greatness" are gendered, connected to conceptions of virility and male prowess; and what we can do today to change some of this, and make music last more responsibly and inclusively.

Course Description: For the past two centuries, the culture of Western art music has consisted largely of the consumption of earlier repertoires: music surviving its own time, heard and reheard as a model of excellence. J. S. Bach is still celebrated today, but his wife (also a competent musician) is not; Mozart is, but his just-as-prolific contemporary Antonio Rosetti isn't. This is why, in common parlance, we refer to Western art music simply as "classical." It is – for better or worse – a selection of musical monuments. The idea of an artistic canon (treating certain pieces of music and certain musicians as worthy of continued appreciation) is one of the most complex historical structures of the West, yet one we tend to take for granted. Who chose/chooses the monuments and how? Who is excluded and why? This class offers an exploration of key issues and conceptual tools to evaluate notions of authorial immortality/greatness in Euro-colonial environments since the eighteenth century. To this period date many practices that shaped our enduring fascination with these larger-than-life figures: from biographies boasting heroic accounts of musicians' lives and compositional progress, to thinking of artistic creativity as a product of masculine prowess and virility, which sustained the creation of a male-dominated artistic canon.