

COURSE SYLLABUS

THTR 351

SPRING 2026

Live Sound Action: Learning at the Crossroads of Theatrical Training and Spiritual Practice

(Devising Original Theater 2)

TIME/TBD: Twice a week for 1 hour and fifteen minutes

Room: Acting Studio

The Maltz Performing Arts Center (MPAC)

Associate Professor Eliza Ladd Schwarz

Office: MPAC #289

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Open Office: TBD and by appointment

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge the Lenape (Delaware), Shawnee, Wyandot Miami, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and other Great Lakes tribes (Chippewa, Kickapoo, Wea, Piankeshaw, and Kaskaskia) native to the land on which Case Western Reserve University resides and express gratitude and appreciation to those who have and continue to live in the Northeast Ohio location where we practice.

WELCOME

I embrace an interactive classroom /studio where there is a fluid and open exchange of process, growth, and humor. This is a welcome space and a learning environment that supports and embraces diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences and honors identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, and any other).

History is not the past, it is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history. - James Baldwin

We have been given the sacred task of making hearts large through story. We are working to make hearts that are capable of containing much love and much sorrow, hearts capacious enough to contain the complexities and mysteries and contradictions of ourselves and of each other. We are working to make hearts that know how to love this world. - Kate De Camillo

In the theatre, there are infinitely more languages, beyond words, through which communication is established and maintained with the audience. There is body language, sound language, rhythm language, color language, costume language, scenery language, lighting language - all to be added to those 25,000 words. - Peter Brook

Liturgy is a constant reaffirmation of the experience of a group of people. . . from the united states senate to the Marine Corps to baseball fans enjoying a game at the stadium, there is a liturgical identification . . . Ritualistic behavior is an integral part of all life—not only the life of human beings, but every kind of life, from bees, wolves, cats, birds, insects, worms right down to bacteria. Ritual is simply an inherent aspect of social interaction. - John Daido Looi

What makes something sacred?

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Live Sound Action: Learning at the Crossroads of Theatrical Training and Spiritual Practice

This course is designed to give the student an experiential introduction to communal practices of sound and movement that exist in both theatrical training and spiritual traditions. A physically-based studio class comprising an intellectual engagement as well as a more personal heart-based investigation, students will ultimately become meaning makers and create an original theatrical/spiritual practice rooted in embodied research. Emphasis will be placed on creative, collaborative, and reflective skills as well as an exploration of the potential health and spirit benefits of such communal creative practices.

The course will begin with a module on religious theory and the function of theater, during which students will discern their personal connection to essential ideas. Next we will identify and practice expressions of sound and movement in various spiritual traditions, and elucidate how these elements of sacred ritual and liturgy influence contemporary performance practices. Finally we will become meaning makers, applying what we have learned and creating our own contemporary and spiritual performance practice.

Throughout the semester the group will practice and develop physical, collaborative, and reflective skills designed to provide a container for the presence of truth and the truth of presence. There will be ongoing reflection on the questions of:

What is sacred?

How does creative expression relate to a sense of belonging and the release of anxiety?

What makes something a “spiritual practice”? Can we discern common elements across example traditions/practices?

What is the benefit of group experience/embodied ensemble engagement, including both participation and witness, and how does it influence individual sense of well being?

Each week will consist of discussion of readings and topics, exploration of experiential practice, and articulation and reflection on individual experience. Students will work individually, in partners, in small groups, and as an entire ensemble. The class is a studio class, meaning that there is an ongoing physical and embodied element to the engagement with the material. The class will culminate in an open sharing of an original creative ensemble practice.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester students will:

- Cultivate a sense of community through ensemble sound and movement
- Expand permission to play including kinesthetic, spatial, vocal and self awareness
- Develop tools for personal and artistic growth through embodied practice and ensemble engagement
- Describe and discuss foundations of spiritual practice and the origins of theater
- Draw connections/demonstrate relationships between the social function of spiritual practice and that of theater
- Identify and explore essential physical and aural ingredients of diverse spiritual and theatrical practices
- Compare and contrast sound and movement practices rooted in spirituality with those found in theatrical forms
- Apply these tools of sound and movement to the creation of an ensemble ritual, ceremony, or contemporary spiritual practice
- Engage in research on an ensemble practice in the arena of sport, food, kids play, community or politics, and interpret its relationship to theatrical training and spiritual practice
- Articulate the attributes of one's own sense of belonging, and discern the qualities of ensemble engagement which contribute to it
- Cultivate presence, focus, and mindful engagement in performance and community
- Demonstrate professionalism, which includes the ability to give, receive, and apply feedback and adjustments, as well as the ability to be an active, generous, and supportive member of the ensemble

The above objectives and outcomes are met by:

- Daily mindfulness of body and breath scan
- Daily verbal check-in with the ensemble circle, identifying and articulating personal physical and emotional state
- Daily physical warm-up that includes development of personal self-care practice
- Daily opportunity for shared personal reflection of growth, including as it relates to sense of belonging
- Daily written reflection in journal
- Weekly in-class discussions of readings cultivating community dialogue
- Weekly expressive and physical ensemble exploration of learned ideas, topics, and practices
- Weekly opportunity to witness other students and offer feedback
- Weekly participation in common google doc cultivating dialogue and resonance about the ideas, process, and practices of the class
- Monthly reflection paper on topics of readings and in class experience
- In studio creation and performance of a unique community practice incorporating ceremony, ritual, and personal expression

CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE / DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION

- I embrace an interactive classroom /studio where there is a fluid and open exchange of process, growth, and humor. This is a welcome space and a learning environment that supports and embraces diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences and honors identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, and any other).
- if you have a name or set of pronouns that you would like to be called, please let me and the class know
- If you feel like your performance in class is being impacted by experiences outside (or inside) of class please don't hesitate to speak with me. I hope to be a resource for you.
- At any time you can submit private feedback that may lead to me making a general (undisclosed) announcement to class if necessary to address your concerns.
- I like many am still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please speak with me about it. (again, private feedback is always an option.)
- Much of the work in this class is experiential and unfolds in a sequential manner. Attendance and participation is essential. Your success in this course, as well as the success of the course itself, is dependent upon everyone's participation and contribution. You are a company of creators. You need each other for audience, partner work, and in ensemble practice. Practice professionalism including nourishing the creativity of the classroom.
- Come to class with a positive and open mind, attitude, and body/voice. Embrace an attitude of respect, openness, and willingness to own your own experience and process as well as honor that of others. Disrespect will not be tolerated. Above all, be curious.
- Over the course of the semester, we will work individually, in partner, and as an ensemble, practicing awareness and respect. Honor your boundaries as needed. Learning to differentiate between discomfort and lack of safety is important and part of the process.
- The work in this class can be physically demanding and it is the responsibility of the student to let me know of any injury or illness that could in any way impact their participation in class. It is the responsibility of the student to stop participation if they are at risk of injury. You are responsible for taking care of yourself, and self care is an important value.
- Each student will begin at their own level and will be graded on their personal improvement and development. All of our physical practices can be modified for students with injuries or disabilities. If you have a documented disability, you may be eligible to request accommodations. Please see the links to disability resources on the resources page of this syllabus.
- Practice professional etiquette: be ready to work 5 minutes before class begins, dressed appropriately (flat-soled shoes; flexible movement clothes) and with all other business put aside. Bring journal to class each day, as well as handouts and other materials as needed. Use of phone or other devices in class is not permitted without specific request and permission.

- If you have questions or concerns in regards to course content or practices, please reach out to me by phone or email and/or come to open office time.
- Open office time is an informal place to ask questions, share history, or chat about subjects that are arising in or outside of class, all are invited to drop by, request an appointment, or spontaneously ask for some time after class.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Each student is allowed one unexcused absence; after that, I will deduct two points per absence from your grade. If absent, you are responsible for all assignments and work covered in class.

If you are going to be late or absent, please text 917-617-8865 and inform another student in the class so they can give me the message.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Journal and folder for handouts, notes, writing and research
- Easy to move in clothing, you may want knee pads (dance or soft, not hard ones)

READINGS

short articles and selections from the following books will be provided on canvas:

The Power of Myth by Joseph Campbell

Sapiens: The Birth of Humankind - A Graphic History by Yuval Noah Harari

Theatre: Its Art and Craft by Gendrich and Archer

Theatrical Worlds edited by Charlie Mitchell

Understanding Theories of Religion: An Introduction by Ivan Strenski

Bringing the Sacred to Life - The Daily Practice of Zen Ritual by John Daido Lori

Sweat Your Prayers - Movement as Spiritual Practice - The Five Rhythms of the Soul by Gabrielle Roth

Rooted: Life at the Crossroads of Science, Nature, and Spirit by Lynda Lynn Haupt

Readings in Black American Music edited by Eileen Southern

Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam by Carl W. Ernst

The Essential Rumi - New Expanded Edition, translated by Coleman Barks

The Conference of the Birds by Farid Al-Din Attar

The Fruitful Darkness: A Journey through Buddhist Practice and Tribal Wisdom by Joan Halifax

Tantra Illuminated: The Philosophy, History, and Practice of a Timeless Tradition by Christopher D. Wallis

The Empty Space - by Peter Brook

A Director Prepares - Seven Essays on Art and Theatre by Anne Bogart

This Very Moment: teaching thinking dancing by Barbara Dilley

Letters to a Young Artist by Anna Devere Smith

The Viewpoints Book by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau

Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory and Practice by Mary Overlie

Improvisation on the Edge by Ruth Zaporah

Urban Bush Women, by Jawole Willa Jo ZollarZollar

and Other articles

GRADING PERCENTAGES

Students will be evaluated on completion of all assignments as directed and in timely manner and their ability to follow directions, enthusiastic participation, and the growing depth and clarity of their work.

- Class Participation
Attendance, preparation, discussion, engagement as participant and witness, focus, continuous development of skill level and awareness, application of each day's work and content to the next 20%
- Participation in Student Perception Surveys (3) Beg-Mid-End 05%
- Short Answer assessment / exam 10%
- Google doc for weekly reflection/group discussion (x12) 10%
- Independent Research Project on ensemble practice 05%
- Written Reflection Paper.1 on process/experience (2 -3 pages) 10%
- Written Reflection Paper.2 on select reading (2 -3 pages) 10%
- Written Reflection Paper.3 on belonging 10%
- Final Ensemble Project: Develop Original Spiritual/Theatrical Practice 20%
share it as performance, write individual reflection on it

total 100%

- *All written work must be written in Times New Roman size 12 double spaced. Do not include a heading other than name and title of assignment. No extra spaces between paragraphs. All work should be printed out and handed in at the start of class on the day the assignment is due.*
- *Late work will receive a significant deduction of points.*
- *Rubrics for each assignment will be posted on Canvas*
- *There will be some outside rehearsal expected in preparation for small group and ensemble project*
- *Ongoing weekly rehearsal / preparation to be assigned and discussed throughout the semester.*
- *Each student is required to have one individual meeting with professor during semester*

Grading Scale: Grading scale

A	90% - %100
B	80% - 89%
C	70% - 79%
D	60% - 69%
F	below 60%

LINKS TO UNIVERSITY RESOURCES/POLICIES

Academic Integrity

<https://bulletin.case.edu/undergraduate-academics/academic-integrity/>

Student Code of Conduct

[CWRU Student Code of Conduct](#)

Sexual Misconduct Policy

<https://case.edu/equity/sexual-harassment-title-ix/sexual-harassment-policy>

Disability Resources:

<https://case.edu/studentlife/disability/about>

(216) 368 - 5230 (213) or via email at: disability@case.edu

Resources for Psychological Health, Well being and Resilience

*University Health and Counseling Services (UHCS)

<https://case.edu/studentlife/healthcounseling/counseling-services>

220 Sears Building, Cleveland OH 44106 , (216) 368-5872, [my- healthconnect.case.edu](https://my-healthconnect.case.edu)

*Virtual counseling at Timely Care, 24/7 at: <https://app.timelycare.com/auth/login>

*Reach Out App: quick access for support, crisis hotline, guidance

<https://case.edu/studentlife/healthcounseling/student-wellnesssuicide-prevention/reach-out-app>

CWRU Food Resources

A comprehensive list of free food and small furniture / housing items:

<https://case.edu/studentlife/dean/resources/food-insecurity-resources>

Physical Resource Center (PRC)

located at: Carlton Commons 11892 Carlton Rd, Cleveland, OH 44106, free resources, clothing, school kitchenware, supplies, food pantry M-Th 4-7, Sat 12-4

Resources for students dealing with Financial Stress

*Homelessness: Coordinated Intake at (216) 674-6700 (8-8 M-F)

*Housing for Women:

The City Mission: Laura's Home. Location: 18120 Puritas Ave Cleveland, OH 44135. Phone: 216.431.3510,

<https://www.thecitymission.org/our-services/lauras-home>

Zelie's Home. Location: Private. Hours: 9am to 5pm Monday-Friday. Phone: 216.282.8053, [https://](https://www.zelieshome.org)

www.zelieshome.org

Seasons of Hope. Location: Private. Hours: 7pm to 7am, 216.421.0536, <https://www.ccdocle.org/programs/seasons-of-hope>

*Housing for Men:

The City Mission - Crossroads. Location: 5310 Carnegie Avenue Cleveland OH 44103. Phone: 216.431.3510,

<https://www.thecitymission.org/our-services/crossroads>

St. Herman's House of Hospitality. Location: 4410 Franklin Blvd Cleveland OH 44113. Hours: Call or stop by between 9am and 5pm. Phone: 216.961.3806, <https://www.sainthermans.org>

(thanks to Dr. Alexis Block for compiling some of these resources)

CLASS SCHEDULE

MODULE 1:

Introduction to religious theory and the function of theater

Week 1 This Group - personal connection and experience with big words, ensemble development
‘Start where you are to go far’, I wonder: What creates a sense of belonging?, What is sacred?
reading due: Syllabus

Week 2 Religious Theory / Concepts and Ideas / ‘world traditions’ plus / The Function of Theater
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due

Week 3 The Function of Theater / Myths / Cosmology
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due

Week 4 Humankind / Storytelling / Evolution
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due
Reflection Paper

MODULE 2:

Approaches to sound and movement in spiritual traditions

Week 5 Zen Arts - Buddhism
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due

Week 6 Sufi Arts, Hafiz, Whirling, Mysticism
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due

Week 7 Hinduism: Tantra: Shape, Repetition, Rhythm, Chant
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due

Week 8 Judaism / Christianity, African American Church, Indigenous /Aboriginal
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due
Reflection Paper

Spring Break

MODULE 3: Exploration of sacred ritual and liturgy through contemporary performance practices

Week 9:, *The Five Rhythms*, Music and Movement, Shamanism
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due

Week 10: Improvisation and Composition / Space and Time and Presence / *The Red Square, Contemplative Dance Practice*
mindfulness awareness practice
short answer assessment exam
readings due
google doc due

Week 11: *Cosmological Composition, Nomadic Citizenry, Live Sound Action*, Instruments and Objects, Labyrinth, The Circle
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due

Week 12: Sound, Song, and Instruments, *Way Over Yonder* - ensemble song experience
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due
google doc due
Reflection Paper

MODULE 4: Becoming meaning makers: creating a contemporary spiritual practice

Week 13: Ensemble Practice, development of original field practice
mindfulness awareness practice
readings due:

google doc due:

Week 14: Ensemble Practice, continue development of original field practice

mindfulness awareness practice

Workshop for the public - possibility

readings due:

google doc due:

Week 15: Performance/work in progress presentation/Final Project; Reflection

mindfulness awareness practice

Final Project will be our final exam, it will be held / shared during class time and written component will be due some days after final project presented