M510: Performers and Performances

Fall 2015

Instructor: Prof. Ayana Smith

Class Meetings: T/R 1-2:15pm

Overview: This course will be taught in collaboration with Prof. Dana Marsh, coordinator of the Historical Performance Institute, and his class M516: Advanced Topics in Early Music. Together we will address the following questions: how can musicology inform performance, and how can performance inform musicology?

Students will work on collaborative research-based performance projects.

Course Description:

What happens when we view the history of music from the point of view of the performers and performances that created that history? In the early modern era, cultural shifts in performance enabled individual performers to alter the landscape of musical composition. While many of these performers were also composers, and thus had a direct hand in shaping musical language, style, and texture, others were not—but through collaboration these musicians had similar influences on musical development. Our process for discovering these connections will encompass a full range of performance-related concerns: who were the people who shaped influential performances, and what were their roles? What are the musical, textual, and imagistic sources that inspired and documented their creativity? How can we understand, from today’s perspective, the practical elements of their music making? Repertory will include music from the late sixteenth through early eighteenth centuries. Our sources, drawn from primary and secondary materials, will also reflect our multi-faceted approach. Opportunities for developing individual projects will allow students to connect the class materials to their own performance and research interests.

Who should take this class? Anyone interested in making deeper connections between what we do as musicians and the study of music history. Students need not have expertise in early music, only curiosity. Singers! Instrumentalists! Music Historians!