

## **Songwriting and Popular Music**

Welcome to Songwriting and Popular Music! In this course we will investigate the persistent and changing themes found throughout American popular music in the 20th century. The class will examine the themes and techniques unique to various genres in America's musical history. Students will then use these observations to craft their own musical pieces. Students' pieces will be recorded as part of the class album at the end of the semester. As this course is based primarily on songwriting, it is strongly recommended that students have intermediate skill level in either piano or guitar.

### **Instructors:**

Stuart Robinson ([scr2@duke.edu](mailto:scr2@duke.edu))

Bryan Rahija ([br8@duke.edu](mailto:br8@duke.edu))

**Faculty sponsor:** Robert Zimmerman

### **Grading:**

Participation: 20%

Grading will be based on frequency and quality of participation.

Presentation/Composition 1: 20%

Each student is required to make two presentations to the class on a genre of music. To accompany each presentation, the student must write a complete, original song of at least 2 minutes in length. Students will be graded on thoroughness of presentation and accuracy of interpretation of the genre. Creativity will also be rewarded.

Presentation/Composition 2: 20%

Final Paper/ Composition: 40%

As a final project, students must write an original and complete composition that synthesizes the two types of music on which the student has presented. The student must write 5 pages comparing, contrasting, and analyzing the two genres and should explain how they combine elements of these two genres in their song.

### **Dates for Faculty Advisor to appear**

February 27: British Invasion, Sixties pop

January 30: Middle Ages through the 1800s

March 20: Punk

General class structure:

Student presentation

Students share original compositions

Listen to recordings

Discussion of genre, compositions

## **1. Introduction - Jan 23 2006**

Talk about students' favorite music, musical background  
What makes a good song?  
Outline weekly student presentations.  
Introduction to written music

## **2. Middle Ages through the twentieth century - Jan 30**

Readings:

“Guide to Western Composers and their Music from the Middle Ages to Present.” (5 pgs)  
<http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/>

“Mathematics and Music: A Search for Insight into Higher Brain Function.” Wendy S. Boettcher; Sabrina S. Hahn; Gordon L. Shaw *Leonardo Music Journal* > Vol. 4 (1994), pp.53-58

“Classical Music as Popular Music.” James Parakilas. *The Journal of Musicology*. Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 1-18

“Jazz: America's Classical Music.” William "Billy" Taylor. *The Black Perspective in Music* > Vol. 14, No. 1, Special Issue: Black American Music Symposium 1985 (Winter, 1986), pp. 21-25

Webb, Chapter 1 (20 pages)

Total: 52 pgs.

## **3. Early twentieth century folk music - Feb 6**

Readings:

“Blues, criticism, and the signifying trickster,” Ayana Smith. *Popular Music*, Volume 24, Issue 02, May 2005, pp 179-191

“Blind Lemon Jefferson: the myth and the man.” Alan Govenar. *Black Music Research Journal*, Spring 2000 v20 i1 p7(15).

Songwriters on Songwriting: Willie Dixon, p 19 - 27

Off the Record: Jimmie Davis: You are my sunshine: 58-66

Webb, Chapter 2 (17 pgs)

Total: 60 pgs

## **4. Blues and Soul - Feb 13**

Readings:

Songwriters on Songwriting: John Lee Hooker 98 - 106

Webb, Chapter 3, 4 (43, 56 pgs)

Total: 107

## **5. Motown - Feb 20**

Guest speaker: Farokh Irani, lead singer for the Widowmakers, a Durham area Motown cover band.

Readings:

Songwriters on Songwriting: Steve Cropper Sittin' On the Dock of the Bay 34-42

Webb, Chapter 5, 6 (20, 63 pgs)

Total: 91 pgs.

## **6. British Invasion, Sixties pop - Feb 27**

Readings:

"Accidents, hooks and theory," Charles Kronengold. *Popular Music*. Issue 3, October 2005. pp 381-397

"For the Beatles: Notes on Their Achievement." Tim Riley. *Popular Music* > Vol. 6, No. 3, Beatles Issue (Oct., 1987), pp. 257-271. Stable URL: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0261-1430%28198710%296%3A3%3C257%3AFTBNOT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T>

Off the Record: John Sebastian: Do You Believe in Magic; 146-154

Off the Record: Bob Dylan: 69 - 87

Total: 56 Pgs

## **7. Reggae - Mar 6**

Readings:

"The Co-optation of a "Revolution": Rastafari, Reggae, and the Rhetoric of Social Control." Stephen A. King. *Howard Journal of Communication* Issue: Volume 10, Number 2 / May 1999 Pages: 77 - 95.

"Reggae, Rastafarians and Revolution: Rock Music in the Third World" *Journal of Popular Culture*, Volume XVII Issue 1 Page 61 - Summer 1983, doi:10.1111/j.00223840.1983.1701\_61.x, Volume XVII Issue 1,

Webb, Chapter 7 (63 pgs)

Total: 81 pgs

## **8. Punk - Mar 20**

Readings:

"Punk's Origins: Anglo-American syncretism." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. Publisher: Routledge, part of the Taylor & Francis Group. Issue: Volume 24, Number 2 / August 2003. 21 pages

“Punk.” University of Lund. Department of Sociology. SVX 203 - Cultural Studies and Contemporary Cultural Theory. Master Course. Autumn term 2004.  
<http://theses.lub.lu.se/archive/2004/12/03/1102067882-23594-663/SOC04057.pdf> (60 pages)

Webb, Chapter 8 (37 pgs)

Total: 118 pgs

### **9. Grunge - Mar 27**

Readings:

“Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life.” Lawrence Grossberg. *Popular Music* > Vol. 4, Performers and Audiences (1984), pp. 225-258

“Subcultural Identity in Alternative Music Culture.” Holly Kruse *Popular Music* > Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan., 1993), pp. 33-41

Webb, Chapter 9 (31 pgs)

Total: 72 pgs

### **10. Electronica - Apr 3**

Readings:

“Pleasure Beats: Rhythm and the Aesthetics of Current Electronic Music.” Ben Neill. *Project Muse* (4 pgs)

“Electronic Bowed String Works: Some Observations on Trends and Developments in the Instrumental/Electronic Medium.” David Neubert. *Perspectives of New Music* > Vol. 21, No. ½ (Autumn, 1982), pp. 540-566

“Neuroendocrine responses of healthy volunteers to `techno-music': relationships with personality traits and emotional state.” Gerra G.1; Zaimovic A.; Franchini D.; Palladino M.; Giucastro G.; Reali N. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, Volume 28, Number 1, 1 January 1998, pp. 99-111(13) Publisher: Elsevier Science.

Webb, Chapter 10 (62 pgs)

Total: 90 pgs

### **11. Rap - Apr 10**

Readings:

“The Aesthetics of Rap.” Mtume ya Salaam *African American Review* > Vol. 29, No. 2, Special Issues on The Music (Summer, 1995), pp. 303-315

“Slouching toward Bork: The Culture Wars and Self-Criticism in Hip-Hop Music.” Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar *Journal of Black Studies* > Vol. 30, No. 2 (Nov., 1999), pp. 164-183

Off the Record: Madonna 615-623

Webb, Chapter 11 (36 pgs)

Total: 75 pgs

## 12. The Contemporary Music Landscape - Apr 17

Readings:

“Re-Examining the Concept of the 'Independent' Record Company: The Case of Wax Trax! Records.” Stephen Lee. *Popular Music*, Vol. 14, No. 1. (Jan., 1995), pp. 13-31.

“Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon.” Robert Fink. *American Music* > Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), pp. 135-179. Stable URL: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=07344392%28199822%2916%3A2%3C135%3AEEMAPM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-P>

Webb, Epilogue (19 pgs)

Total: 81 pages

Primary Texts:

Nash, Graham. *Off The Record: Songwriters on Songwriting*.

Webb, Jimmy. *Tunesmith: Inside the Art of Songwriting*.

Zollo, Paul. *Songwriters on Songwriting*.