

MU/HI 180: A History of Popular Music in the USA

Meetings: T Th 11:00-12:15

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Course Description

It may be argued that America's most powerful contribution to the arts and culture of the world over the last century has been its popular music. From the blues to country, jazz to rock, our nation's political, social, and economic history has been mirrored and influenced by the styles of popular music that have developed in our unique cultural melting pot. This course will provide an overall history of popular music in America during the 20th century, with emphasis upon mainstream popular music since 1954. Its focus will be the simultaneous independence and interdependence of black and white musical cultures in America, and how this can help us understand our nation's history in new and different ways. In addition to learning about the stylistic development of popular music, students will acquire various interpretive strategies (including methods of aural analysis) that will allow them to approach popular songs as historical "texts" as well as autonomous works of art.

NOTE: You do NOT need to read music or play an instrument to take this course.

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Aurally identify the important components of a piece of popular music using appropriate musical terminology.
- Aurally identify and describe the defining musical elements of various genres of American popular music.
- Aurally identify and describe the influences of both West African and Western Classical musical culture on a piece of popular music, as well as the influences of specific genres of American popular music.
- Describe how popular music can be studied from both musical and non-musical (sociological, economic, cultural, political) perspectives, and explain the birth and development of various genres of American popular music from this multiplicity of perspectives.
- Describe how the mythic and visual images of popular artists contribute to the ways their music is understood and interpreted – today and over the past one-hundred years.
- Analyze critically the ideologies of various popular music traditions, and describe how those ideologies developed and are maintained.
- Summarize the content and methodology of a sample piece of contemporary scholarship on popular music.

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Course Materials:

- 1.) Internet access
- 2.) A PC with headphones or good-quality stereo speakers
- 3.) Required Textbook/CD: *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3*, Starr/Waterman, Oxford, Second Edition. Available in the bookstore.
- 4.) Other reading assignments may be handed out in class and/or posted online (see below)
- 5.) **Reading assignments** will be posted on-line and/or handed out in class.
- 6.) **Outlines for each lecture** can be found on the web-site. Be sure to print each one out and bring it to the appropriate class. Outlines will not be available in class.

Website:

The course website is your primary source for information about course requirements, assignments, syllabus, additional readings, and additional listening assignments. You can also find an updated syllabus and other information.

Assignments/Exams

- **Reading/Listening Assignments:** You are responsible for all readings and listening assignments, as assigned in the textbook and on the website
- **Three exams (Mar. 6, Apr 17, and during exam period - TBA)**
- **Analysis Assignment: due May 13 (or before).** A short but focused analysis of a given song, with additional discussion questions. More details will follow..
- **Article Summary, Due Friday, April 18.** More information forthcoming.
- **Required concert attendance and concert review: Due Monday, March 24**
Students must attend the following on-campus concert and complete a written concert review as directed. If you have an irreconcilable conflict with either you must concert Dr. Case ASAP and arrange for an alternate concert to attend.
Gypsy Schaeffer (jazz quartet)
Tuesday, Mar. 18, 7pm, SCA
Free Admission
- **Extra-Credit Assignment: Due Wednesday, May 14**
An additional concert review for the following on-campus concert
Aardvark Jazz Orchestra/ENC Choral Union
(music of Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, and others)
Sunday, May 4, 7:30 pm, Wollaston Church
Free Admission
If you are performing in the Choral Union concert you may still write a review.

NOTE: **NO EXTENSISONS** will be granted on any assignment for any reason. Exams may only be made up with a note from the dean or doctor. Exams must be made up by the following class period.

Grading:

Exams 1 and 2:	20% each	40%
Final Exam:	20%	20%

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Analysis Assignment:	25%	25%
Concert Review:	5%	5%
Article Summary:	10%	10%
TOTAL		100%
Extra-Credit Assignment:		+5%

Note: The Final Exam will not be cumulative. It will simply be a third exam that is given during the assigned final exam period. Seniors may choose to take the final exam. If they choose not to, their grade will be calculated out of 80%.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Jan. 31	Listening Skills	Mar 25	Beatles 1
Feb 5	Western Classical Music and the Pop Song	Mar 27	Blues-Rock
Feb. 7	West African Music and Culture	Apr 1	Rock and Sixties Counterculture
Feb. 12	Blackface Minstrelsy	Apr 3	Rock and Sixties Counterculture
Feb. 14	Spirituals and Gospel	Apr 8	Beatles II
Feb. 19	Blues	Apr 10	EXAM 2
Feb. 21	Jazz and American Culture: Birth to Bebop	Apr 15	NO CLASS – Advising Day
Feb. 26	Country: Industry and Authenticity	Apr 17	Heavy Metal
Feb. 28	Post-War Rhythm & Blues	Fri., Apr 18	Article Summary Due
Mar. 4	Rock'n'Roll 1	Apr 22	Sixties Soul
Mar 6	EXAM 1	Apr 24	Dance Music and the DJ
Mar 18	Rock'n'Roll 2	Apr 29	Hip Hop
Mar 20	Required Jazz Concert, 7:00 pm	May 1	Birth of Punk
Mar 20	The Folk Music Revival and Dylan	May 6	Independent and “Alternative” Rock
Mon, Mar. 24	Concert Review Due	May 8	Independent and “Alternative” Rock
		May 13	Analysis Assignment Due
		Wed, May 14	Extra-Credit Assignment Due
		TBA	EXAM 3

LISTENING/READING ASSIGNMENTS, Jan. 31-Mar. 6

Jan. 31 **Listening to Popular Music**

MU/HI 180: A History of Rock & Roll and Popular Music in the USA

[Website:](#) Lecture notes and sound files

Feb 5 **Western Classical Music and the Pop Song**

[Starr/Waterman](#)

Read: pp. 18-40

Listen: Foster: Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair (1854)

Harris: After the Ball (1892)

Read 64-73; 80-85

Listen Gene Austin: My Blue Heaven (1927)

George Gershwin: I Got Rhythm (1930),

sung by Ethel Merman (1947)

[Website:](#) Listen to Ich Grolle Nicht and Over the Rainbow

Feb. 7 **West African Music and Culture**

[Website:](#) Readings and Sound Files

Feb. 12 **Blackface Minstrelsy**

[Website:](#) Readings and Sound Files

Feb. 14 **Spirituals and Gospel**

[Website:](#) Readings and Sound Files

Feb. 19 **Blues**

[Starr/Waterman](#)

Read: 86-108

Listen: W.C. Handy: St. Louis Blues, perf. Bessie Smith/Louis Armstrong
(1925)

Robert Johnson, Cross Road Blues (1936)

Optional: Charley Patton, Tom Rushen Blues (1929)

Blind Lemon Jefferson, Black Snake Moan (1926)

Read 175-177

Listen: Muddy Waters, Hoochie Coochie Man (1954)

[Website:](#)

The website contains additional sound files and detailed commentary on the three styles of blues we will be covering in this lecture. While you will not be responsible for all the songs on the site, there is some overlap with songs from the lectures – which, of course, you will be responsible for. The site is will be an important resource to help you understand the musical differences/similarities between various blues sub-genres.

Feb. 21 **Jazz and American Culture**

[Website:](#)

Readings and Sound Files

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Feb. 26

Country Music: Industry and “Authenticity”

Starr/Waterman

Read: 109-119

Listen: Carter Family, Gospel Ship (1935)

Jimmie Rodgers, Blue Yodel #2 (T for Texas) (1929)

Read 142-151

Listen: Roy Acuff, Great Speckled Bird (1936)

Sons of the Pioneers, Cool Water (1941)

Read: 182-194

Listen: Bill Monroe, It’s Mighty Dark to Travel (1947)

Website:

The website contains a sampling of sound files that further illustrate the musical styles described in the readings. Pay special attention to the songs featured in the lecture.

Note all of the above songs except for “Gospel Ship” can be found on the website as well.

Feb. 28

Post-War Rhythm & Blues

Starr/Waterman

Read: 152-165

Optional listening: Nancy, Nature Boy

169-175

Listen: Louis Jordan, Choo-Choo Ch’Boogie (1946)

Charles Brown, Black Night (1951)

Read 179-182

Listen: Ruth Brown, Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean (1953)

Big Mama Thornton, Hound Dog (1953)

Website:

Familiarize yourself with all of these sound files. Many will be studied in class.

Mar. 4

Rock’n’Roll I

No reading; catch up and study for Exam 1

Listening: On Website

Mar. 6

Exam 1