

MUSIC 113
SPECIAL TOPICS IN POPULAR MUSIC

BULLETIN INFORMATION

MUSC 113- Special Topics in Popular Music (3 credit hours)

Course Description:

An investigation into the function of popular music in contemporary society. May be repeated as content varies by suffix and title

SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed to encourage the study and analysis of popular music. It seeks to foster the knowledge of selected popular music repertoire, artists and performance styles as well as help students acquire important critical listening skills for the understanding of contemporary vernacular music. By focusing on a single artist or performing group like Bob Dylan, The Beatles, Public Enemy, Radiohead or others, and by describing and analyzing different performance styles for each, the different social and political landscape in which their work participates, and the technology that shapes it, this class seeks to help students understand the important role popular music plays in contemporary music history and in American culture at large.

ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of Music 113, students will be able to:

1. Interpret major works of popular music
2. Theorize the function of popular music in contemporary society
3. Analyze the social, musical, and political impact of popular music
4. Identify and evaluate key albums in a selected artists'/groups' career
5. Practice terminology associated with the analysis of popular music
6. Exercise "critical listening" techniques
7. Construct a group presentation synthesizing aspects of music/art and popular culture

SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS

1. Varies depending on the selected Topic.
2. Example Course Bibliography:
 - a. Tim Footman, *Welcome to the Machine: OK Computer and the Death of the Classic Album*
 - b. Brandon Forbes and George Reisch, eds., *Radiohead and Philosophy*
 - c. Dai Griffiths, *OK Computer*
 - d. Marianne Letts, *Radiohead and the Resistant Concept Album: How to Disappear Completely*
 - e. Marvin Lin, *Kid A*

- f. Mac Randall, *Exit Music: The Radiohead Story*
- g. Joseph Tate, ed., *The Music and Art of Radiohead*

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAM

- 1. Class Discussions:** Bi-weekly in-class discussions will reinforce and clarify theoretical concepts and terminology introduced in the assigned readings in the textbook. They will also provide helpful and practical knowledge of how to apply and employ descriptive and analytical terms in the analysis of popular music. Assigned listening examples of specific pop artists or groups will be examined in detail. Knowing what specific elements contribute to the understanding of large questions of style, genre and historical periods can be challenging. Class participation in the discussion and acquisition of analytical tools and vocabulary is strongly encouraged. Be prepared to speak and to take notes. Reading the assigned material in the textbook and listening to the assigned musical examples *before* coming to class is required.
- 2. Midterm/Final Exams:** The acquisition of analytical skills, and the correct use of historical and stylistic knowledge of popular music in general and a specific artist's/group's output will also be achieved and reinforced through two tests: a midterm and final exam. The midterm for this course will be in a multiple choice format and covering issues raised in the first half of the course. A midterm review will take place on the class period before the exam. The Final will follow a similar format covering the readings, listening and discussion since the midterm. Both exams are designed to help students master a small set of analytical terms and the specifics of a single genre and set of musical examples. They will ask students to identify verbally (through the correct employment of terminology) and aurally specific pieces of music and the elements that identify them as belonging to a certain composer and/or historical style. These assessment methods will allow students to demonstrate their ability to identify and analyze important works by the selected artist or group being studied.
- 3. Final Projects:** These varying depending on the Topic, but could include Team Presentations in which students present using various audio and visual formats, the historical, cultural and political understanding and analysis of a specific set of songs. Projects may also include analytical papers on a topic chosen by the student, or creative projects such as the generation of alternative set of lyrics for a particular song or set of songs with that reflect a understanding of the cultural, social and political aspects of the original lyrics. Such creative projects would also involve the several pages of critical commentary explaining the student's work.
- 4. Listening Journals:** As a way to catalogue your listening throughout this course and practice developing critical listening vocabulary, students will keep a journal. This journal will consist of student's thoughts and reactions to the assigned recordings as well as any connections that a student is able to make to the course readings. The journal is to be in an informal writing style and should chronicle the student's development with the music over the course of the semester.

There is no set a page limit for journal entries, but writing one page per week is probably not writing enough, writing twenty pages a week is probably writing too much. It may not be necessary to write about every single song that is assigned. Students may choose to discuss a single song from an album, or a collection of songs (perhaps even coming from different albums). Alternatively, students may also wish to talk about a more theoretical issue raised in that week's readings. In short, journals are meant to encourage and practice critical listening and students are free to pursue a variety of writing styles and techniques to that end. Students are responsible for keeping their journals up to date. Journals will be checked at midterm and after the last week of class. Journals are to be typed, double-spaced, stapled, and in 12-pt font with standard margins.

SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS

TOPICS IN POPULAR MUSIC: RADIOHEAD

Week 1: Course Introduction

Week 2: Introduction to Radiohead and the Study of Popular Music
Reading: Edward Slowik, "Radiohead and Some Questions about Music."
Mark Greif, "Radiohead, or the Philosophy of Pop."
Mac Randall, "Exit Music: Chapters 2-4."

Week 3: *Pablo Honey*: Context and 'Creep'
Reading: Mac Randall, "Exit Music: Chapters 5-6."
Carys Wyn Jones, "The Aura of Authenticity: Perceptions of Honesty, Sincerity and Truth in *Creep* and *Kid A*."
Listening: *Pablo Honey* (1993). (Recommended: *Manic Hedgehog Demos* (1991), *Drill EP* (1992)).

Week 4: *The Bends*: New Refrains
Reading: Mac Randall, "Exit Music: Chapters 7-8."
Greg Hainge, "Tor(rt)uring the Minotaur: Radiohead, Pop, Unnatural Couplings, and Mainstream Subversion."
Listening: *The Bends* (1995). (Recommended: *My Iron Lung EP* (1994)).

Week 5: *OK Computer I*: Songs
Reading: Dai Griffiths, "Listening to *OK Computer*." Tim Footman, "Thank You for Listening: The Album."
Listening: *OK Computer* (1997)

Week 6: *OK Computer II*: Videos and Death of an Era
Reading: Tim Footman, "Makes you look Pretty Ugly—The Videos," "The Emptiest of Feelings: *OK Computer* and the Death of Indie Music," and "A Song To Keep Us Warm: *OK Computer* and the Death of the Classic Album."

Listening: *OK Computer* (1997)

- Week 7:** *Meeting People is Easy* (and Midterm Review)
Viewing (in class): *Meeting People is Easy* (1998)
- Week 8:** MIDTERM
- Week 9:** *Kid A I: This Is Really Happening*
Reading: Marvin Lin, "Introduction," "Kid Aesthetics," "Kid Authenticity," "Kid Adaptation," and "Kid Activism."
Mark B.N. Hansen, "Deforming Rock: Radiohead's Plunge into the Sonic Continuum."
Listening: *Kid A* (2001)
- Week 10:** *Kid A II: Themes, Images and Anti-Videos*
Reading: Adam Koehler, "The Mutilation of Voice in 'Kid A' (Or, My John Mayer Problem)."
Lisa Leblanc, "'Ice Age Coming': Apocalypse the Sublime, and the Paintings of Stanley Donwood."
Joseph Tate, "Radiohead's Anti-Videos: Works of Art in the Age of Electronic Reproduction."
Listening: *Kid A* (2001). (Recommended: *I Might Be Wrong: Live Recordings* (2001)).
- Week 11:** *Amnesiac: Antidotes*
Reading: Marianne Letts, "After Years of Waiting, Nothing Came: *Amnesiac* as Antidote," and "I Might Be Wrong: *Amnesiac* and Beyond."
Listening: *Amnesiac* (2001). (Recommended: *I Might Be Wrong: Live Recordings* (2001)).
- Week 12:** *Hail to the Thief: Sonic Politics*
Viewing (in class): *The Most Gigantic Lying Mouth of All Time*
Reading: Joseph Tate, "'Hail to the Thief': A Rhizomatic Map in Fragments." Sean Burt, "The Impossible Utopias in 'Hail to the Thief.'" Jason Lee, "Evil and Politics in 'Hail to the Thief.'" Listening: *Hail to the Thief* (2003)
- Week 13:** *In Rainbows: Take Our Music!*
Reading: Perry Owen Wright, "Sexier More Seductive."
D.E. Witkower, "Everybody Hates Rainbows." Colin Greenwood, "Set Yourself Free."
Listening: *In Rainbows* (2007)
- Week 14:** Group I Presentations

Week 15: Group II Presentations
Listening Journals Due