

Department: Music

Course No: 1003

Credits: 3

Title: Popular Music and Diversity in American Society

Contact: Robert Miller

Content Area: CA1 and CA 4

Catalog Copy:

MUSI 1003. Popular Music and Diversity in American Society: Race, Gender, Class, and Resistance. Either Semester. Three credits. Two lecture hours and one discussion hour per week. No prior musical training or knowledge required. An introduction to popular music and diversity in America: jazz, blues, Top-40 pop, rock, hip-hop and other genres. Musicians and their music studied in the context of twentieth-century and contemporary American society. CA 1. CA 4.

RATIONALE FOR ACTION REQUESTED

a) reason for adding the course,

Although there are several undergraduate courses that include some aspects of contemporary popular music, none of the large classes open to the general student population has music as its main focus. The course will close a significant gap in the music offerings available to undergraduates who are not music majors, and we are sure that it will generate large enrollments and enthusiastic responses, especially since we are proposing it for both CA1 and CA4. It will address a topic of the highest significance in the history of American culture and of the highest relevance for contemporary society. Its interdisciplinary and diversity aspects are well aligned with university-wide endeavors to promote interdisciplinary teaching and instruction and to provide additional emphasis on social and cultural diversity.

b) why course is appropriate for inclusion at 1000 or 2000 level,

There are no pre-requisites for enrollment. The course consists of a broad survey at the introductory level.

c) justification for enrollment restrictions,

d) effect on other departments, None

e) amount of overlap with existing courses, There is a small amount of overlap with MUSI 1002, 'Sing and Shout: The History of America in Song' (capacity 60), in the area of folk music c. 1920-1950 and in 1960s protest music; the approach taken in the two courses is very different, however, and the new course is not expected to affect significantly enrollment in MUSI 1002. The same is true for AFAM 3568, 'Hip-Hop, Politics and Youth Culture in America' (capacity 15).

- f) other departments consulted None
- g) effects on regional campuses, None

Course Information:

a. A brief (2-3 sentences) course description that includes course goals and learning objectives. Music 100x is designed to introduce students to the most significant genres of American popular music of the last one hundred years, and to the role of cultural diversity in their evolution. It will emphasize pre-1940 African-American genres, the music of rural and non-mainstream urban Caucasians, and post-1945 pop and rock music across the expanding American demographic spectrum, including new immigrant groups from the Caribbean basin and Central and South America. It seeks to make students more culturally discerning and active listeners, by surveying the elements of music (melody, rhythm, form, etc.) as used in popular styles, and their role in generating social meaning.

b. Course requirements: Specify exam formats, nature and scope of weekly reading assignments, nature and scope of writing assignments, problem sets, etc. This is a large lecture class with discussion sections. The midterm and final examinations will consist of multiple-choice questions and short written answers, addressing musical elements, cultural and aesthetic issues, and pieces studied, including responses to audio extracts played during the exam. Weekly assignments preparing for or reinforcing the lectures are taken from the course textbook, which includes an anthology of recordings, and comprise 30-40 pages, as well as listening assignments. Additional assignments for the discussion sections will be drawn from primary material such as newspapers and magazines (e.g. Rolling Stone), websites, podcasts, and films, and will also involve writing exercises that enable students to explore issues in more depth than is possible in the exams.

c. List the major themes, issues, topics, etc., to be covered. Since at least the end of the First World War, popular music has provided what is arguably the most creatively vibrant, influential and turbulent arena in which Americans have experienced, negotiated, and in recent times 'consumed' the cultural conflicts and transformative potential of racial, ethnic, sexual, geographical, and economic diversity. The significance of this arena for American college students of the last half-century can hardly be overstated; this is especially true for the current generation, to whom the internet and the iPod have given unparalleled access to an astonishing range of different kinds of music, and the ability to create and control their own personalized sonic environments (the 'soundtrack' to their lives). The affective power of music, and its flexible role in constructions of subjectivity and identity, give a special immediacy to questions of diversity, which may be experienced only in relatively abstract and indirect ways in other contexts. Yet while any listener to American popular music can hardly miss the fact that race, for example, has played a fundamental role in its development, many are unaware of the rich history of such issues, or the arguments and evidence that exist for how music can construct (and deconstruct) categories such as race and gender.

Simply put, this course seeks to make students more attentive and critical listeners, who understand not only the many styles, forms and expressive modes of popular music, but also the culturally constructed nature of musical sounds that they may formerly have taken for granted as inevitable or timeless. With its emphasis on diversity, it will focus on the manner in which minority perspectives, represented in genres such as blues, salsa, or hip-hop, have emerged from

marginal cultural enclaves into the mainstream, and what happens to both the minority perspective and the dominant culture in the process. It will not attempt a comprehensive survey, but will concentrate instead on key repertoires, movements, and figures, such as the formative role of African-American sources in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the rise of feminist perspectives from the mid-1970s on, or the career of a pivotal musician such as Duke Ellington, who trod a tightrope between black and white expectations; considerable emphasis will be placed on music of the last twenty-five years, since this tends to be the music with which our students are most familiar. Though it will use a textbook on popular music that stresses diversity, it will go further, through supplementary readings (often taken from contemporary primary texts) that emphasize the perspective of the minority groups in question, and how they see their music.

Issues of appropriation and exploitation will also be explored, e.g. the appropriation of the perceived 'authenticity' of black musics such as the blues by white artists and audiences wishing to protest broader injustices, such as economic oppression, or the 'fake' commercialism of the music industry; this could also cut across class rather than race lines, as with the use of white 'outsider' rural folk music to propel a 1960s anti-war movement led largely by white urban middle-class activists. The course will also address conflicts within minority communities, e.g. opposition to gangsta rap from black religious leaders, as well as distinctions between the perspectives of distinct and often separate communities defined by race and ethnicity, and those of repressed voices within the dominant white culture, such as women or homosexuals. In the latter category performative strategies have often proved to be powerful tools of subversion, as in the co-option by female bands of sexually aggressive rock idioms, in particular the phallically symbolic performance gestures associated with the electric guitar.

Examples of this latter kind underline the efficacy of music as a means to encode and actualize social power relationships: its instant and powerful appeal to the body and to the emotions, its fluid subject positions, and its broad ability to model social experience, particularly in the relationship of the individual and the community, give it an almost unique potential in this regard. And the advent of broadcasting and recording, which magnify music's ability to transcend social and geographical distance and to cross boundaries between otherwise separate communities, has also been critical. While this is not primarily a course in music appreciation or analysis, it will introduce students to enough technical and critical vocabulary to enable them to appreciate the way music makes its effects, and the subtleties of how social meanings relevant to diversity and power are musically constructed.

d. If this is an existing general education course, please specify how the revisions will affect the way in which the course fulfills the requirements.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed:

1. Become articulate

Students will learn how to express and evaluate more clearly their responses to a ubiquitous and culturally important aspect of their everyday experience, popular music.

2. Acquire intellectual breadth and versatility Students study a subject about which the great majority has limited knowledge (particularly about popular music before c. 1990, and jazz) thus broadening their intellectual horizons. The chronological approach and coverage of many different types of popular music expose them to different historical phases of American musical and general culture. Students master concepts, technical vocabulary and analytical skills in this

new area.

3. Acquire critical judgement

Students will become more aware of cultural relativism in value judgments about music -- e.g. changing notions of beauty and ugliness, distinctions between purportedly 'high' and 'low' culture -- in terms both of historical change and of different contemporary populations; they will also learn to notice and critique the way music is used to sway their opinions in advertising, political broadcasting etc.

4. Acquire moral sensitivity

The course addresses questions of social justice at a number of different levels, and confronts difficult issues about how the affective and sensual power of music, while often mobilized as a force for liberation, can also be a dangerous and sometimes covert vehicle of violence and social oppression (e.g. misogynistic and homophobic strands in heavy metal and rap. Many people listen to music containing embedded social implications that they would not necessarily embrace in other areas of their lives. It is important for students to be self-critical with respect to their cultural choices.

5. Acquire awareness of their era and society

Approximately one third of the semester is devoted to popular music of the last twenty years, which is studied with respect to more general patterns in American society and culture in which popular music has occupied an increasingly dominant role in the creation of values and social identities. The remainder of the course studies earlier phases of popular music history which transformed American culture by creating popular musics of broad appeal that often represented non-mainstream sectors of society. Both the music and the socio-cultural processes in the production of popular culture are crucial to understanding current developments.

6. Acquire consciousness of the diversity of human culture and experience

The course studies the music of racially, ethnically, sexually, socially and geographically diverse groups over a span of more than a century, exploring a wide range of musical styles and forms in highly contrasting and rapidly evolving cultural contexts.

7. Acquire a working understanding of the processes by which they can continue to acquire and use knowledge

The skills developed in critical listening to the various forms of popular music equip students with general listening skills that can be applied to any music. The investigation of music from a socio-cultural perspective prepares students to approach all music and other forms of cultural expression in this way.

CA1 Criteria:

1. Investigations and historical/critical analyses of human experience

The course introduces students to one of the major manifestations of modern human experience. Moreover, it considers music in a broader cultural context, thus emphasizing music's 'embeddedness' in more general patterns of human activity and ensuring that music is approached from an artistic-humanistic perspective.

2. Inquiries into philosophical and/or political theory

3. Investigations into the modes of symbolic representation

4. Comprehension and appreciation of written, graphic and/or performance art forms

Music is a performance art. Though most of the music in the course will be experienced in the form of recordings, we hope to bring visiting performing artists into the classroom, drawing on existing sources of funds around campus that support cultural diversity.

5. Creation or “re-creation” of artistic works culminating in individual or group publication, production or performance. Three-credit courses in this category must be supplemented by written or oral analysis/criticism.

CA4 Criteria:

CA4 criteria:

1. Emphasize that there are varieties of human experiences, perceptions, thoughts, values and/or modes of creativity

The diverse racial, ethnic, gender, social and geographic groups studied in the course, and consideration of the differing values embodied in their musics, fulfills the emphasis on varieties of human experience and creativity. Popular music in this country constitutes a critical arena for the experience and negotiation of diversity.

2. Emphasize that interpretive systems and/or social structures are cultural creations

The course will demonstrate the cultural foundations of interpretive systems in a variety of ways, not least in generational shifts on questions of musical and moral propriety (or indeed of what qualifies as 'music' at all) that are central to popular music history, e.g. as once risqué genres styles become mainstream, with jazz arrangements of Christmas carols or Christian rap, rock music in commercials, or even as interludes between NPR news stories. Traditions such as the cover version, which may involve radical reinterpretation of what is ostensibly the same song, also help to emphasize such cultural fluidity.

3. Consider the similarities that may exist among diverse groups

Though much of the emphasis of the course will inevitably be on difference, one of the most fascinating aspects of American popular music has been the way in which different minority groups have perceived shared experiences, especially of oppression, and drawn on one another's musical traditions in order to express this, e.g. the widespread appropriation of blues and rap outside the African-American community, or the use of white rural folk music in a 1960s anti-war movement driven largely by middle-class urban intellectuals.

4. Develop and understanding of and sensitivity to issues involving human rights and migration

The emphasis on minority groups whose music has often functioned as personal and group protests against prejudice and oppression will increase sensitivity about human-rights issues, and the inclusion of popular music of immigrant groups, such as those from Latin-American and Francophone countries (e.g. Haiti), combines human rights and migration issues. Migration within the United States, most notably movements of African-American populations from the rural South to cities in the North, crucial to the development of blues and jazz in particular, will also receive consideration.

5. Develop an awareness of the dynamics of social, political and/or economic power in the context of any of the above four items

The investigation of the tensions and complicated relationships between the status of much popular music as a medium of protest and often radical personal expression, and musicians' drive for recognition and commercial success (at the risk of sacrificing artistic independence and message), provides a classic case for the study of how economic power impinges on cultural activity. It will also consider originally “non-mainstream” groups (youth, anti-war activists, environmentalists) whose music helped to change popular opinion on specific issues and to transform general popular culture.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Prov Comp 2009 course