MUS15 Syllabus – Summer Session II, 2013

Instructor: Brian Griffeath-Loeb (bgriffea@ucsd.edu)
Office hours: by appointment
Class meetings: Tu/Th 6:00p – 8:50p, Conrad Prebys Music Center: Room 145
Section: N/A
Final Exam: N/A

Course Overview

We start with the fact that there is no good or bad music in the world—just music. Discrimination on the basis of taste is worthwhile, but too often masquerades as objective truth in everyday discussion. We must begin to recognize that our views are, on their own, of little import beyond the self. "Legitimacy" does not depend on what we prefer or how forcefully we express that preference. It matters not how much we have listened, read, or for how long we have followed a particular artist. It matters not the breadth of our musical education. It is, rather, the degree to which we can articulate the "why" behind our taste that brings meaning to its expression. Armed with understanding, we contextualize our viewpoint such that others may engage with it on a substantive level, whether in agreement or opposition. We are further in a position to challenge/reevaluate such preferences as a means of expanding personal horizons, and to help others do the same.

At its core, this is a course focused on the cultivation of self-knowledge and discovery. To this end, we will consider songs from a variety of genres over the past 50 years, breaking them down into constituent elements, which may then be discussed in-depth. Over the session, we will develop a vocabulary for engaging these concepts, how they function in popular music, and the role they play in shaping our tastes. Students will practice critical thinking, self-examination and articulation (class presentations), writing skills (e.g., listening journal, final essay), and discussion of aesthetic judgments—both as individuals and a group.

Grading Distribution

Participation	30%
In-Class Writings	10%
Listening Journal	20%
Class Presentation	20%
Final Essay	20%

Participation

The single-most important component of this course. Please be prepared to regularly voice opinions when called upon (e.g., "hotseat" sections) as well as freely within group discussion. Please also be prepared to respond to follow-up questions as we attempt to narrow in on what you like and why.

Do not worry about the "rightness" or "wrongness" of opinions. Such words do not apply here. What matters for your grade and—far more importantly—your experience is sincerity of engagement—that you're committed to *showing up*. Challenge yourself to articulate what you like and why with evermore specificity. Do not worry if this is difficult. It should be difficult.

In-Class Writings & the "Rule of Three Listens"

This course will involve *a lot* of listening. It is highly recommended—both in and outside of class—that songs, whether familiar or not, be given at least three listens. Where time allows, we will be doing so together and documenting if/how impressions after each listen. I will collect these writings from time to time as a means of better getting to know your critical thinking process / mode of investigation.

Listening Journal

Between each meeting, you will be asked to listen thrice (or more) to a specified song or collection of songs (in which case, 3x each) and take down your impressions, just as with the in-class writings. Here, though, you will be asked to reflect on these impressions, what they seem to indicate about you / your preferences as a listener, whether, in the case of a disliked song, you can imagine a perspective from which it becomes interesting, etc.—all with reference to as many specific moments in the music as possible. I.e., what is going on at timestamp *x*, what about it am I responding to, what is the nature of the response…annnnnd, am I satisfied with this as a response? (active vs. passive role in cultivating one's taste)

NOTE: students *e-mail journal entries to the instructor <u>in advance </u>of the beginning of class*.

ALSO NOTE: the instructor will respond to journal entries via e-mail, often with further questions to be answered by the student as a follow-up.

Class Presentations

Each student will give **<u>one</u>** formal presentation (~30min.) to the class, on a song (or songs, or album, or… etc. → *just run it by me*) of their choosing, toward the end of the term (slots TBD). This should help you prepare material for their final essay (which may be on the same song) as well as to demonstrate your ability to investigate, dissect, and articulate a song and corresponding taste response.

Final Essay

A written investigation of a song/collection of songs/album of your choosing. As above, it should demonstrate your ability to investigate, dissect, and articulate a song and corresponding taste response. This essay may be on the same topic as your class presentation if you so choose. Your grade will not be dis/advantaged based on this choice.

Policies

<u>Late work</u>: assignments are to be turned in as indicated in the course calendar below. Work turned in after the date/time specified is considered late, and will be docked a full letter grade (10%)/day, starting immediately following the class period or other listed deadline.

<u>E-mail policy</u>**:** I will do my best to respond to all inquiries in a timely fashion. This excludes the 24-hour period before any project deadline, during which responses will be handled at my discretion. This is meant to encourage students to seek out the help they need *well in advance*. Anticipate the unexpected and plan your studies accordingly to ensure you're in good shape, even if something (e.g., outside the purview of our class) comes up.

Lecture Calendar

Date	Class Agenda	Assignments

Aug 6	1. Course overview
	    a. Syllabus
	    b. Order of Pres./Hot Seats
	2. Personal introductions
	    a. Interests / favorite genres
	    b. Musical background
	    c. Reason(s) for taking class
	3. Course Mission
	4. Initial presentation and discussion of course terminology, parameters of sound
	    a. Ongoing topic for consideration: "The Hook"—what is it?
	
	        -break-
	
	TOPIC 1: Form, Part 1
	• traditional forms (contrast and memory)
	   ○ ABAB(AB) "Mr. Brightside" by The Killers (*Hot Fuss*, 2004)
	     ▪ Lyrics, melody, harmony production
	   ○ ABABCB "In Da Club" by 50 Cent (*Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, 2003)
	     ▪ ditto above (esp. prod.)
	   ○ BABAB(AB) "Stop in the Name of Love by The Supremes (1965)
	     ▪ ditto above
	• formal play, interrelation: micro to macro
	   ○ "We Used to Wait" by Arcade Fire (*The Suburbs*, 2010)
		For Thursday, August 8
		1. **Listening Journal, Entry #1**
		    a. "Oh God, Where Are You Now?" by Sufjan Stevens (*Michigan*, #13)
		    b. Student's choice

Aug 8	TOPIC 1: Form, Part 2
	• trajectory and climax
	   ○ "I Would Die 4 U" by Prince (*Purple Rain*, 1984)
	   ○ "Kentucky Avenue" by Tom Waits (*Blue Valentine*, 1978)
	• modulation (Sisqo, et al.)
	• non-traditional song forms
	   ○ "Oh God, Where Are You Now?" by Sufjan Stevens (*Michigan*, 2003)
	   ○ "Redford (For Yia-Yia & Pappou)"
	
	        -break-
	
	TOPIC 1: Form, Part 3 (the album)
	• Of Monsters and Men (*My Head Is an Animal*, 2012)
		For Tuesday, August 13
		1. **Listening Journal, Entry #2**
		(2 of the following 3)
		    a. "Call Your Girlfriend" by Robyn (*Body Talk*, #8)
		    b. "Cosmic Love" by Florence & the Machine (*Lungs*, #9)
		    c. Student's choice

Aug 13	TOPIC 2: Lyrics/Message	*For Thursday, August 15*
	• message	1. **Listening Journal, Entry #3**
	o "Sail Away" by Randy Newman (*Sail Away*, 1972)	(2 of the following 3)
	o "Call Your Girlfriend" by Robyn (*Body Talk*, 2010)	a. "Peg" by Steely Dan (*Aja,*#4)
	• rhyme scheme and word play	b. "Black as the night" by Nahko Bear (*Dark as Night*, #9)
	▪ ("All My Life" …baseline?)	c. Student's choice
	o "November Rain" by Guns N' Roses (*Use Your Illusion I*, 1992)	
	▪ ("Because of You")	
	o "Lose Yourself" by Eminem (*8 Mile*, 2002)	
	Hot Seat #1	
	- break -	
	• word painting	
	o "Finishing the Hat" by Stephen Sondheim (*Sunday in the Park with George*, 1984)	
	o "Cosmic Love" by Florence & the Machine (*Lungs*, 2009)	
	Hot Seat #2	
Aug 15	TOPIC 3: Time (rhythm, meter, beat, syncopation)	*For Tuesday, August 20*
	• meter and subdivision	1. **Listening Journal, Entry #4**
	o "All You Need Is Love" by The Beatles (1967)	(2 of the following 3)
	o "Precious Things" by Tori Amos (*Little Earthquakes*, 1992)	a. "Stop in the Name of Love" by The Supremes ('65 single)
	Hot Seat #3	b. "Paper Planes" by M.I.A. (*Kala*, #11)
	- break -	c. Student's choice
	Hot Seat #4	
	• suspension of beat	
	o "I Knew You Were Trouble" by Taylor Swift (*Red*, 2012)	
	…taken to limit	
	o "Love Love Love" by Monsters and Men (*My Head Is an Animal*, 2012)	
	o "Black as the night" by Nahko Bear (*Dark as Night*, 2013)	
	• syncopation: from grounded to weightless	
	ex.: "Anyone Who Had a Heart" "Girls Just Want to Have Fun"	
	o "Peg" by Steely Dan (*Aja*, 1977)	
	o "Lose Yourself" by Eminem	

Aug 20	TOPIC 4: Melody/Phrase/Harmony
	• phrase design (period)
	    ○ ex.: "Yesterday," "John Henry"
	    ○ "Lose Yourself" by Eminem
	        ▪ sync augmented by phrase striation (lang vis. music)
	• contour (step vs. leap, up vs. down)
	    ○ Lose Yourself"
	        ▪ inflection, emphasis
	    ○ "Girls Just Want to Have Fun"
	        ▪ melodic irregularity
	    ○ "Stop in the Name of Love" by The Supremes (1965)
	        ▪ harmonic irregularity
	• "the hook" (what can/can't it be?)
	    ○ "Paper Planes" by M.I.A. (*Kala*, 2007)
	    ○ "Cosmic Love"
	
	        - break -
	
	Hot Seats #5-8
		For Thursday, August 22
		  1. **Listening Journal, Entry #5**
		    (2 of the following 3)
		      a. "Mr. Roboto" by Styx (*Kilroy Was Here*, #1)
		      b. "How to Disappear Completely" by Radiohead (*Kid A*, #11)
		      c. Student's choice

Aug 22	TOPIC 5: Harmony (cont.), Timbre & Production
	• vocal
	    ○ "Mr. Roboto" by Styx (*Kilroy Was Here*, 1983)
	    ○ "Hide and Seek" by Imogen Heap (*Speak for Yourself*, 2005)
	    ○ "Don't Wake Me Up" by Chris Brown (*Fortune*, 2012)
	
	Hot Seat #9
	
	        - break -
	
	Hot Seat #10
	
	• accompaniment
	    ○ "Roadrunner" by Jonathan Richman and The Modern Lovers (*The Modern Lovers*, 1972
	        ▪ acoustic
	    ○ "How to Disappear Completely" by Radiohead (*Kid A*, 2000)
	        ▪ electronic
	        ▪ dissonance vs. consonance
		For Tuesday, August 27
		  1. **Listening Journal, Entry #6**
		    (2 of the following 3)
		      a. "Beat It" by Michael Jackson, feat. Eddie Van Halen (*Thriller*, #5)
		      b. "Iz They Wildin Wit Us & Getting' Rowdy Wit Us?" by Busta Rhymes, feat. Mystikal (*Extinction Level Event: The Final World Front*, #11)
		      c. Student's choice

Aug 27	TOPIC 6: Persona and Virtuosity
	• Cult of the personality
	    o "Beat It" by Michael Jackson (*Thriller*, 1983)
	    o "I Would Die 4 U" by Prince
	        ▪ vocalization, gender, & sexuality
	    o "Iz They Wildin Wit Us & Getting' Rowdy Wit Us?" by Busta Rhmes, feat. Mystikal (*E.L.E.*, 1997-98)
	        ▪ Aggression, artificiality
	
	Hot Seats #11
	
	          -break-
	
	Hot Seats #12
	
	TOPIC 7: Quotation vs. Appropriation
	• Remix
	    o "Valerie" vs. "Call on Me"
	        ▪ Hook→Structure…?
	    o "Waiting for a Star to Fall" vs. "Star to Fall"
	        ▪ Hook<u>s</u>→Structure…!
	• Parody, Sampling, Plunderphonics (tbd)
		For Thursday, August 29
		  1. Listening Journal, Entry #7 (last one!)
		      a. Student's choice *A*
		      b. Student's choice *B*
		  2. Prepared First Student Presentations	

Aug 29	Student presentations 1-2
	• group discussion
	          -break-
	Student Presentations 3-4
	• group discussion
		For Tuesday, September 3
		  1. Prepared Student Presentations	

Sep 3	Student Presentations 5-6
	• group discussion
	          -break-
	Student Presentations 7-8
	• group discussion
		For Thursday, September 5
		  1. Prepared Student Presentations
		  2. Final Essay
		      a. Due to instructor <u>by e-mail</u> *before* class on Thursday	

Sep 5	Student Presentations 9-10 • group discussion -break- Student Presentations 11-12 • group discussion	done!!!!!!11!!one!	

Partial Glossary of Course Terms

Accompaniment: supportive music that plays along with the primary melody

Beat: a steady pulse, a unit of time

Bridge: a transitional section that does not repeat, usually leading from the second chorus into the final chorus (or the final verse, which in turn leads to the final chorus) of a song

Chord: any set of three or more notes sounding simultaneously; a kind of harmony

Chorus: a section that repeats both musically and lyrically

Contour: the perceived curve of pitch over time; from conjunct (smooth) to disjunct (jagged)

Form/Structure: the large-scale design of music, usually into discrete and recurring sections

Harmony: the combination of at least two pitches sounding simultaneously

Hook: a musical idea used in popular music to make a song appealing and to "catch the ear of the listener"

Key: a subset of all pitches determining the mood or character of music

Line: a discrete part of a musical composition (e.g., melody, bass line, percussion, etc.)

Lyrics: the set of words which make up a song, usually divided into verses and choruses

Measure: a segment of time defined by a given number of beats

Meter: indicates how to subdivide measures and which beats to emphasize

Modulation: a change of key in music

Parody: involves changing or copying existing (usually well-known) musical ideas of a composer or artist

Persona: the social role or a character played by an actor/performer

Phrase: a group of successive melodic notes functioning similarly to a sentence of language

Pitch: the highness or lowness of sound (based on frequency of vibration [Hz]); a pitched sounding event (as opposed to unpitched)

Rhyme Scheme: a pattern of rhyme between lines of a poem or song

Rhythm: the organization of music in time

Stanza: a grouping of two or more lines of lyrics, functioning as a discrete unit

Syncopation: accents out of sync with the beat

Tempo: the speed at which music is played; based on the beat (i.e., beats/minute)

Timbre: the "tone color" of a sound; that which allows a person to distinguish between different sound sources (e.g., piano and voice)

Verse: a section that repeats musically but varies lyrically

Word Painting: music that reflects the literal meaning of a song