



COURSE OUTLINE

MUS 156
Course Number

History of American Pop Music
Course title

3
Credits

3 lecture
Hours

Catalog description:

Analytical and historical survey of American popular music with an emphasis on the period from 1950 to the present. Students will develop an understanding of the cultural, social, technological, and musical forces shaping each decade covered. Students will apply critical analysis to musical styles, instrumentation, and song structure in addition to issues of race, ethnicity, social class, and gender as formative factors influencing its evolution.

Prerequisites: ENG 101

Co requisites: None

Required texts/other materials:

Gregory, Hugh. *A Century of Pop*, A Cappella Publishing, Distributed by Independent Publishers Group, 1998.

Last revised: 2007

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Course Goals:

The student will be able to:

1. Identify, define, and explain a wide variety of pop musical styles and genres.
2. Understand that popular music is shaped by and, in turn, has an impact on the social, political, and cultural milieu from which it arises.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the chronological development of American pop music in the context of social, political, and historical forces affecting its evolution.
4. Investigate, realize, and discuss the multicultural nature of American pop music as a hybridization and synthesis of disparate cultural influences including African, Latino, Caribbean, Scots – Irish folk music, as well as European “art” music.
5. Analyze the role that fashion, archetype, and image play in the marketing and appeal of musical artists.
6. Identify and distinguish between the use of confessional and artificial imagery in the content of pop music lyrics.
7. Understand how technological advances such as radio, recording media, (analog discs, magnetic tape, CD’s), electronic instruments, digital recording and editing software, and the internet create the circumstances under which new forms of popular music develop and, conversely, how new forms of music serve as a catalyst for further technological development.
8. Explore and discuss the tension between art and commerce and the ancillary issue of critical vs. popular success.
9. Develop an individual “critical voice” demonstrated by the ability to analyze specific pieces of pop music, assessing their relative artistic merits, and defending his or her view to others both in writing and through discussion.
10. Analyze and discuss the issue of racial and gender discrimination throughout the history of American pop music.

General Education Objectives:

GOAL 1: WRITTEN AND ORAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH:

Students will communicate effectively in speech and writing, and demonstrate proficiency in reading.

GOAL 8: VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS:

Students will analyze, design, and perform works of visual, dramatic, or musical arts.

GOAL 10: DIVERSITY AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:

Students will analyze the importance of a global perspective and culturally diverse peoples.

Evaluation of Student Learning

Each student's attainment of these objectives will be assessed using the following means of evaluation.

Evaluation Tools	% of Grade
Completion of and performance on weekly reading and writing assignments	20%
Midterm visual and aural test of students ability to identify performers, musical structures, styles and chronological context	20%
Completion and presentation of a research paper whose content will focus on an artist or genre, the degree of his/her/its social relevance, his/her/its place in the chronology of the music and impact on its further evolution	20%
A written "review" of a recording using appropriate journalistic language and employing established norms of critical analysis	20%
Attendance and participation in class discussion	20%

Units of Study and Learning Objectives

UNIT I: Historical and Social Context

The student will be able to:

1. Identify important musical artists and classify the musical movements and time periods to which they belong.
2. Describe, contrast, and compare various musical genres and styles and connect them in their proper chronological context.
3. Illustrate the impact that social class, race, and gender had upon the careers of specific pop artists, the composition of their audiences, and on the history of pop music in general.
4. Assess and discuss the effect that social and political forces such as the Viet Nam war, the drug culture, and the civil and women's rights movements have on the popular music of the day.
5. Thoughtfully examine and expound on the issue of censorship throughout the history of pop music (record burnings, radio play bannings, Elvis' "waist-up only" appearance, as well as amendments of lyrics to mollify the fears of TV executives and advertisers).
6. Examine isolated incidents of plagiarism in pop music, the resultant lawsuits against artists such as George Harrison and Stevie Wonder, in light of whether or not the suits were justified and whether the alleged plagiarism was conscious or unconscious.

UNIT II: Musical Structure and Development

The student will be able to:

1. Identify and describe typical pop song structures and conventions such as 32-bar song form and 12-bar blues, and distinguish them from non-pop forms such as sonata, rondo, art songs, or free jazz.
2. Comprehend and discuss how earlier musical idioms such as blues, classical music, and ethnic and world musics have been absorbed and adapted for use in modern pop forms such as funk, heavy metal, and progressive rock.
3. Intelligently assess the relative artistic quality of the work of various pop artists specifying the criteria used in his/her evaluation.
4. Recognize the basic structural, rhythmic, melodic, and orchestrational techniques employed in various pop music genres and be able to group related styles, e.g. Rock-a-billy and surf, funk and R & B.
5. Engage in deep listening, becoming sensitized to the defining nuances of musical detail that characterize and differentiate the various pop music genres

UNIT III: The Role of Imagery, Fashion, and Archetype

The student will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the relationship between artist image or persona and specific musical styles or eras, along with the role of fashion in projecting the image.
2. Assess the degree to which an artist's use of image and fashion is connected with, or motivated by, a social or political statement, and the degree to which the desired effect is achieved.
3. Assess the degree to which an artist's use of image and fashion is purely cosmetic and commercial in nature.
4. Cite and identify the recurrence of specific personae and fashions throughout the history of pop music as archetypal, and analyze the impact of these archetypes on both a conscious and unconscious level.
5. Distinguish between the confessional artist and those employing artifice in terms of their respective use of image, archetype, and fashion.

UNIT IV: The Impact of Technology

The student will be able to:

1. List and describe the major technological advances during the period studied and discuss their impact on the development of pop music on the levels of both recorded and live performance.
2. Analyze recordings from different eras, identifying the time period to which they belong based on the recording techniques employed.
3. Describe the impact that new technologies have on the conception and composition of pop music.
4. Explain how the format of delivery (live concert, radio, TV, 45, LPO, CD, etc.) shapes the content and perception of pop music.
5. Assess the degree to which the evolution of pop music composition and production serves as a catalyst for further growth of technology.

UNIT V: High Art/Low Art Controversy

The student will be able to:

1. Discover and develop their individual critical voice.
2. Evaluate the criticism of others in a thoughtful manner.
3. Understand and explain the conventional critical evaluation of the major artists covered in the course and explain any deviations from the accepted view.
4. Select an artist that the student believes is of major importance and be able to write a forceful justification in terms of artistry, image, impact and influence.
5. Come to an individual conclusion as to the factors leading to critical success and to commercial success and assess why they do not always coincide.