

Selected Topics in Music Literature for Non-Majors:

A History of Song

GEN_MUS 175-0-1

Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:00-12:20, RCMA 1-164

Winter 2020



Instructor:

Ben Weissman

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Office hours:

Wednesday 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM, and by appointment

RCMA 4-152

Course Description:

Song: words sung to music, especially to express ideas and emotions. This course will tell a history of song through examples spanning from antiquity to today's Top 40. Students will learn how to analyze, discuss, and think historically about song as a genre of music, a partner to poetry, a vocal performance, and a human practice. This course will include units on ancient Greek and Judeo-Christian biblical ideas of song; Medieval and Renaissance secular and sacred song; European art song and song cycles; spirituals and work songs; the birth of the music recording industry; protest and folk songs; and music videos and contemporary mass media. Each unit will also ask students to think cross-historically, comparing songs between centuries. Weekly writing assignments will ask students to reflect on assigned materials; additional assessment tools include a song analysis project, a presentation, two small tests, and a final research paper. Class time will be spent discussing assigned readings and recordings, listening as a group, and practicing oral and written description skills. This class is open to all students; no prior musical training is required. The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus as needed throughout the course.

Materials:

All materials will be available through Canvas, via files (PDF, MP3) or links. Readings, listenings, and discussion boards will be posted in the modules section on the class meeting date they are due.

Evaluation methods and grading:

Grades will be composed of the following categories:

Attendance & Participation	20%
Assignments	
Discussion Board Posts:	15%
Presentation:	10%
Analysis Assignment:	10%
Examination	
Small test 1:	10%
Small test 2:	10%
Final Paper:	25%

Grades will be assigned on the following scale:

A = 100-93;	A- = 92-90;	B+ = 89-87;	B = 86-84;	B- = 83-80;
C+ = 79-77;	C = 76-73;	C- = 72-70;	D = 69-60;	F = 59-0

Attendance

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. You are expected to arrive on time prepared to participate actively in discussion of the material. Excessive absence is potential grounds for failure of the course. Beginning with the second unexcused absence, students will be penalized in their grade. If exceptional circumstances arise, please contact me beforehand with proper documentation of your excused absence.

This course will abide by the School of Music's attendance policy:

Students are expected to attend all sessions of courses...for which they are registered.... When one-time conflicts arise...the student's attendance obligation for the scheduled course...still stands.... For exceptional circumstances, contact the student affairs office for assistance.

Participation (& Discussion)

Students are expected to actively participate in each class. Your contributions are crucial to the success of this class. Reading and listening must be completed before each class, as listed on the schedule on Canvas.

Discussion involves listening to and engaging with your fellow students, alongside contributing your questions, comments, and thoughts. For each class meeting you will come prepared to

pose at least one discussion question to your classmates on the basis of the assigned material for that day. Participation constitutes an actual grade and will be calculated according to the following criteria:

A: You contribute to class frequently (almost every session). Your comments reflect excellent preparation, build from the comments of others and/or offer direction for the discussion. If you were not in the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished markedly.

B: You contribute to class sometimes. Your comments reflect good preparation, sometimes build from the comments of others and/or sometimes offer direction for the discussion. If you were not in the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished.^{[1][SEP]}

C: You contribute to class rarely. Your comments reflect adequate preparation, occasionally build from the comments of others and/or occasionally offer direction for the discussion. If you were not in the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished somewhat.^{[1][SEP]}

D: You contribute to class very rarely or not at all. As a result, there is little or no basis for evaluation. If you were not in the class, the discussion would not be changed.^{[1][SEP]}

OR

You contribute to class but your contributions reflect inadequate preparation and offer no direction for the discussion. If you were not in the class, the discussion would be improved.

Discussion board postings

Once a week discussion board postings will ask students to respond (in about 200-250 words) to required reading and/or listening assignments in advance of class meetings. In each discussion board, the instructor will pose specific prompts; student posts should engage with these prompts. Student posts should demonstrate comprehension and thoughtful consideration of readings and listenings. You can skip one of these at no penalty.

Analysis assignment

Due **Friday Feb. 7** on Canvas. This assignment will ask you to select a pop song (your choice of one of four, TBD), listen to it closely, and analyze it. You will be asked to submit: graphic notation of 1 minute of the song, a written analysis using concepts learned in this course, and a written description of your experience doing this close listening/analysis assignment.

Presentation

Each student will lead or co-lead a discussion of an assigned reading for part of a class period. Sign up for a particular reading on Canvas—instructions will be announced via Canvas.

Tests

On two dates: **Tuesday, Jan. 28; Tuesday, Feb. 25**. These quizzes will be comprised of listenings and short-answer questions directly about (and extending from) material covered in

class. Students will demonstrate analytic skills of description and grasp of musical concepts studied in this course.

Final Paper

Due **Wednesday, March 18**, on Canvas. This final research paper will ask you to apply concepts, historical context, and relevant materials learned in the course to songs of your own selection. This paper will be a musical and historical analysis. You must submit a brief description of what you wish to focus on in this paper by week 6—**Friday, February 14**. Project details TBA.

Academic integrity: Please be aware of university-wide policies regarding dishonesty in academic work, as well as those specific to the School of Music. Information can be found at www.northwestern.edu/provost/students/integrity/#guide. If you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism, or of the circumstances under which you are obligated to cite a source in your writing, please consult the documents found through this site.

Communication: I will use NU email to contact you about this course, which might include changes or clarifications to the reading and listening assignments. Please check your email regularly for updates.

Accessible NU: Those enrolled in this course who may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me before the end of the second week of the term. All discussions will remain confidential. You should consult the University's Accessible NU office (<http://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/>) to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

Electronic device policy: Laptops, tablets, telephones and other electronics may not be used during our class meetings unless approved as an accommodation for medical or other necessities.

Important dates:

Tues., Jan. 28	Test 1: elements of music, song, poetry, antiquity to Renaissance
Friday, Feb. 7	Analysis assignment due
Friday, Feb. 14	Paper topic due
Tues., Feb. 25	Test 2: art song, popular culture, recording, global song, rock
Wed., March 18	Final paper due on Canvas

Week 1 - Introductions

Tuesday, 1/7: Introductions

Thursday, 1/9: Taste, music, song

- [Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Chapter 1](#)
- [Prudential Advertisement, "I want to be a musician," \(1992\)](#)
- [Marcie Blane, "Bobby's Girl" \(1962\)](#)
- [The Ghost of Faffner Hall, "Music is more than technique" —Piginini meets Ry Cooder](#)

Week 2

Tuesday, 1/14: Taste part 2, popular music

- [Carl Wilson, *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste*, Chapter 1: Let's Talk About Hate \(pp. 1-10\); Chapter 7: Let's Talk about Taste \(pp. 73-86\)](#)
- [Celine Dion, "My Heart Will Go On" \(1997\)](#)
- [Celine Dion, "My Heart Will Go On" \(Live at 2017 Oscars\)](#)
- [Elliott Smith, "Miss Misery" \(Live at 1998 Oscars\)](#)
- [Komar & Melamid, Dave Soldier, Most \(Un\)Wanted Songs \(Spotify\) \(Note: don't feel the need to listen to the entire "most unwanted song"\)](#)
- [Album information, Most \(Un\)Wanted Songs](#)
- [OPTIONAL: 5-min documentary about Most/Least Wanted Songs](#)
- After reading, please consider the following questions: How does music become meaningful to a listener? What is Wilson's stance and approach? How have people theorized about the relationship between taste, aesthetics, and music?

Thursday, 1/16: Elements of music, song

- Allen Forte, *Listening to Classic American Popular Songs*, Chapter One: Preliminaries
 - [Forte reading Spotify playlist \(Jan. 16\)](#)
 - [OPTIONAL: Music: A Social Experience, Chapter 2: Elements of Music](#)
 - [For Music: A Social Experience reading: examples and further reading about topics \(Listening Guide Repertoire and CW Links\)](#)
 - [Tone Generator \(used in class\)](#)
 - [Ableton Beat-making Guide \(I used page 4 of this in class to demonstrate BPM & genre\)](#)
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Week 3 – Antiquity, Medieval, and Renaissance

Tuesday, 1/21:

- [James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence*, Ch. 1 \(pp 1-12, 14-20, excerpt\)](#)
- In addition to the Winn, please read EITHER the Kurke or Culler for Tuesday:
- [Leslie Kurke, *Strangeness of 'Song Culture'*, \(pp 58-62\)](#)
- [Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric, Lyric as Genre* \(pp 49-58\)](#)

Thursday, 1/23:

- [Andrew Gant, *O Sing Unto the Lord*, Chapter 1 \(pp 1-14\)](#)
 - [Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric, Lyric as Genre* \(pp 64-68\)](#)
 - [James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence*, Ch 2 \(excerpt, pp 30-35\)](#)
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Week 4 – European art song and song cycles/rock ballads and concept albums

Tuesday, 1/28: Test I

- [Andrew Gant, O Sing Unto the Lord, Chapter 2 \(pp 15-36\)](#)
- [Harper-Scott and Samson, An Intro to Music Studies, Early and Secular Music \(excerpt, pp 123-127\)](#)
- [Susan Boynton, Medieval Woman's Song, Chapter 3 \(pp 47-51, excerpt\)](#)

Thursday, 1/30:

- [Susan McClary, Modal Subjectivities, Chapter 6 \(pp 122-134, excerpt\)](#)
- [James Anderson Winn, Unsuspected Eloquence, Rhetorical Renaissance \(excerpt, pp 136-149\)](#)

Week 5 – broadsides and contrafacta, early US

Tuesday, 2/4:

- Read EITHER the Goodman or Hamm:
- [Goodman Transatlantic Contrafacta \(392-414\)](#)
- [Charles Hamm, Yesterdays, Chapter 1 \(pp 1- 25\)](#)

Thursday, 2/6:

- Read EITHER the Tunbridge or the Kramer:
- [Laura Tunbridge, The Song Cycle, Concepts \(pp 1-18, excerpt\)](#)
- [Lawrence Kramer, Song Acts, The Schubert Lied \(pp 52-55, excerpt\) and Performance \(pp 86-104\)](#)

Analysis Assignment Due (Friday, 2/7)

Week 6 – recording industry

Tuesday, 2/11:

- [Bergeron, Voice Lessons, Chapter 1 \(3-19, 60-63, excerpts\)](#)
- [OPTIONAL: Paul Valéry, The Art of Poetry, On Speaking Verse](#)

Thursday, 2/13:

- Choose EITHER the Keightley or Goldmark:
- [Keightley Standards](#)
- [Daniel Goldmark Making Songs Pay, Tin Pan Alley](#)
- [OPTIONAL: John Bush Jones, The Songs that Fought the War, I Hear America Singing \(pp 32-53\)](#)

Discussion board + Paper topic

Week 7 - spirituals and work songs/protest and folk songs

Tuesday, 2/18:

- [Virgil Moorefield, The Producer as Composer, Chapter 1 \(pp 1-24, 40-41, excerpts\)](#)
- [The Compressed History of Mastering, episode of podcast Twenty Thousand Hertz](#)
- [OPTIONAL: Morton, Chapter 6: The Heyday of the Phonograph, from Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology](#)

Thursday, 2/20:

- [Laura Tunbridge, The Song Cycle, Rebirth_Pop Song Cycles \(pp 169-186\)](#)
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Week 8

Tuesday, 2/25: Test 2

- Choose EITHER the Brackett or the Peterson:
- [Richard Peterson, Creating Country Music, Chapter 12](#)
- [David Brackett, Interpreting Popular Music, Hank Williams \(pp 75-101, excerpt\)](#)

Thursday, 2/27:

- Be ready to share research project topic (1-2 sentences).
 - [Ramsey_Race Music_Chapter 3 \(excerpts, pp 44-61, 73-74\)](#)
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Week 9

Tuesday, 3/3:

- Choose EITHER the Coyle or Brackett reading:
- [David Brackett_Crossover](#)
- [Michael Coyle_Hijacked Hits](#)
- [March 3 playlist](#)
- [OPTIONAL: Carl Wilson, "Cover Song History" \(Slate, 2018\)](#)

Thursday, 3/5:

- [Benjamin Filene, Romancing the Folk, Chapter 5.pdf](#)
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Week 10 – Rap, autotune, and contemporary strokes

Tuesday, 3/10:

- [Robert Walser, Rhythm, rhyme, rhetoric in the music of Public Enemy](#)

- [March 10 links + bonus.docx](#)

Thursday, 3/12:

- Autotune & Electronic Voice (no reading for today)
- [March 12 Lecture.pdf](#)
- [ROBOPOP Chris Gill Daft Punk Interview.pdf](#)
- [Vocoder MIT Report 1977.pdf](#)

CLASSES END 3/14

FINAL EXAMS BEGIN 3/16

Wednesday, 3/18: Final paper due on Canvas

SPRING BREAK BEGINS 3/21

GRADES DUE 3/23

Weekly Discussion Board Topics

Week 1

In 200-250 words, please do two things:

1. Please reflect on Chapter 1 of Cook's *Music: A Very Short Introduction*. What concept or idea about music stood out to you—and why?

2. Select a "best songs of the decade" or "best of 2019" list online—a bunch have been published in the past few days. What do they use to report and describe to represent each song? How do they review each entry? (musical description, number of plays, album sales statistics, lyrical quotations, etc.) What patterns do you see?

Take a look at a couple of these lists below. You can write about one of these, or find one that's a bit more niche, in terms of genre, part of the world, or a style of song you like (e.g. [loudwire's best metal songs of the decade \(Links to an external site.\)](#)).

- Pitchfork: <https://pitchfork.com/features/lists-and-guides/the-200-best-songs-of-the-2010s/> (Links to an external site.)
- Billboard: <https://www.billboard.com/100-songs-that-defined-the-2010s> (Links to an external site.)
- Wikipedia stats for Billboard (2010s): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Billboard_Hot_100_number-one_singles_of_the_2010s (Links to an external site.)

- NPR: <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/07/767905185/the-2010s-npr-listeners-pick-their-top-songs-of-the-decade> (Links to an external site.)
- Time: <https://time.com/5725150/best-songs-2010s-decade/> (Links to an external site.)

Some sites have made end-of-decade "musical moments" lists instead of/in addition to best song lists. You can write about one of these lists instead of a "best songs" list, if you want to think about music journalism:

- Vulture, on musical moments: <https://www.vulture.com/article/100-music-moments-that-defined-2010s.html> (Links to an external site.)
- Rolling Stone, on musical moments: <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/the-50-most-important-music-moments-of-the-decade-912772/>

Week 2

Please select any episode of the Song Exploder podcast (<http://songexploder.net/episodes> (Links to an external site.)); they range from about 17-22 minutes long). Each episode presents an artist (or artists) discussing one of their songs, and ends with that song played in full.

In 200-250 words, (1) write about how the artist(s) discuss(es) any of the concepts presented in the reading, and (2) after listening to the song yourself, describe some of the songs elements: melody, harmony, form, lyrics, rhythm, etc.

For both (1) and (2), what stood out to you the most? What did the artist seem most/least interested in?

Week 3

For week 3 of our course, please reflect on some of the assigned readings from the week—due Friday, Jan. 24 at 11:59PM.

Please use this space to write about things different than and/or expanding from what we discuss in class. For the remainder of this course, discussion postings will be due on Fridays. Like in this prompt, future discussion board prompts will ask you to write about the things that stood out to you—themes, concepts, and ideas—through reflection, comparison, and coming up with questions.

You do not need to draw on material from both Tuesday and Thursday—feel free to reflect on any grouping of the assigned material from a week. You do not need to wait until Friday to post.

Your task is to do some of following in 200-250 words:

1. Reflect on readings and music — you might compare something from a Tuesday reading(s) to a Thursday reading(s), or compare something we read this week to a reading or concept that we discussed earlier in the course.
2. What ideas about song, lyric, and vocal performance stood out to you about these case studies in history, drawing on this week's reading and class meetings, and why?
3. What question(s) does a particular reading (or do any number of readings) raise for you about song, performance, music, language, etc. in culture? What seems important about this question—and its answer—to you?

Week 4

For week 4 of our course, please reflect on some of the assigned readings from the week—due Friday, Jan. 31 at 11:59PM. You do not need to draw on material from both Tuesday and Thursday—feel free to reflect on any grouping of the assigned material from a week.

Your task is to do **some** of following in **200-250 words**. Please reflect on what stood out to you this week—themes, concepts, and ideas—through by comparing ideas of song across readings, comparing readings, and posing questions on the material:

1. Reflect on readings and music — you might compare something from a Tuesday reading(s) to a Thursday reading(s), or compare something we read this week to a reading or idea that we discussed earlier in the course.
2. What concepts of song, lyric, and vocal performance stood out to you about these case studies in history, drawing on this week's reading and class meetings, and why?
3. What question(s) does a particular reading (or do any number of readings) raise for you about song, performance, music, language, etc. in culture? What seems important about this question—and its answer—to you?

Week 7

For week 7, please reflect on some of the assigned readings from the week—due Feb. 21 by 11:59PM. You do not need to draw on material from both Tuesday and Thursday—feel free to reflect on any grouping of the assigned material from a week.

Your task is to do **some** of following in **200-250 words**. Please reflect on what stood out to you this week—themes, concepts, and ideas. Consider and compare ideas of song, recording, and album between readings, and pose questions about the readings:

1. Reflect on readings and music — you might compare something from a Tuesday reading(s) to a Thursday reading(s), or compare something we read this week to a reading or idea that we discussed earlier in the course.
2. What concepts of song, recording, production, vocal performance, and commercial music making stood out to you about these case studies? Why?
3. What question(s) does a particular reading (or do any number of readings) raise for you about song, performance, music, language, etc. in culture? What seems important about this question—and its answer—to you?

Week 8

For week 8, please reflect on some of the assigned readings from the week—due Feb. 28 by 11:59PM. You do not need to draw on material from both Tuesday and Thursday—feel free to reflect on any grouping of the assigned material from a week.

Your task is to do **some** of following in **200-250 words**. Please reflect on what stood out to you this week—themes, concepts, and ideas. Consider and compare ideas of song, recording, and album between readings, and pose questions about the readings:

1. Reflect on readings and music — you might compare something from a Tuesday reading(s) to a Thursday reading(s), or compare something we read this week to a reading or idea that we discussed earlier in the course.
2. What concepts of song, genre, recording, production, vocal performance, and commercial music making stood out to you about these case studies? Why?
3. What question(s) does a particular reading (or do any number of readings) raise for you about song, performance, music, language, etc. in culture? What seems important about this question—and its answer—to you?

Week 9

For week 9, please reflect on some of the assigned readings from the week—due March 6 by 11:59PM. You do not need to draw on material from both Tuesday and Thursday—feel free to reflect on any grouping of the assigned material from a week.

Your task is to do **some** of following in **200-250 words**. Please reflect on what stood out to you this week—themes, concepts, and ideas. Consider and compare ideas of song, recording, and album between readings, and pose questions about the readings:

1. Reflect on readings and music — you might compare something from a Tuesday reading(s) to a Thursday reading(s), or compare something we read this week to a reading or idea that we discussed earlier in the course.

2. What concepts of song, genre, recording, production, vocal performance, and commercial music making stood out to you about these case studies? Why?

3. What question(s) does a particular reading (or do any number of readings) raise for you about song, performance, music, language, etc. in culture? What seems important about this question—and its answer—to you?