

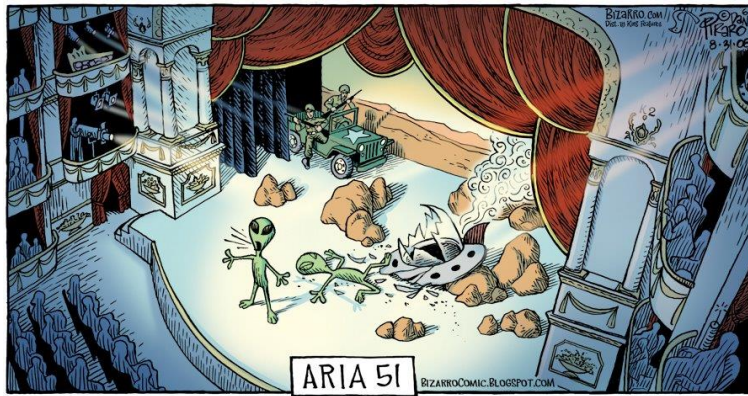
Selected Topics in Music Literature for Non-Majors:

**Music & Humor**

2020FA\_GEN\_MUS\_175-0\_SEC3

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:40 - 4PM, online course

Fall 2020



**Instructor:**

Ben Weissman

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**Office hours:** Wednesday 2-4PM, or by appointment, I can usually make time to meet M-F

**Course Description:**

What makes music funny? Why make humor musical? When does a musical joke lose its punch? In this course, students will study music and humor in song, film, and performing arts through a variety of media and historical contexts, encountering names including "Weird Al" Yankovic, Mel Brooks, Monty Python, Anna Russell, Garfunkle and Oats, among many others. In addition to appreciating witty applications of songful comedy, we will consider musical humor in relation to parody and satire, political commentary and critique, and critical lenses of gender, sexuality, and race.

Each unit will include readings in addition to listening and viewing of television episodes, music videos, and films. Weekly writing assignments will ask students to reflect on required reading and listening assignments in advance of class meetings. Student grades will be comprised of active participation, discussion board engagement, and a research project.

This class is open to all students; no prior musical training is required.

**Materials:**

All materials will be available through Canvas. No purchases will be necessary for this course – all text, audio, and video will be provided online, posted in the modules section on the class meeting date they are due.

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**Evaluation methods and grading:**

Grades will be composed of the following categories:

Attendance & Participation:	20%
Assignments	
Thursday Postings:	10%
Friday Reflections:	15%
Monday Responses:	10%
Final Paper Project	
Project Proposal:	10%
Presentation:	10%
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

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**Class rhythm:** As you plan your quarter, it may be helpful to understand the overall rhythm of this course. In general, class will meet virtually on Tuesdays, 2:40-4PM, via Zoom. Please plan to have reviewed assigned readings and media before the start of class. At these sessions, I will lecture, discuss concepts and topics from the readings and your postings, ask for your thoughts and questions about the readings and media, and perhaps show media.

We will not generally meet on Thursdays, but you will have material assigned for this day. Review the assigned readings and media. There will usually be a writing prompt or assignment relevant to the assigned materials. You'll post your response on a Thursday discussion board.

By the Friday, you'll post on an end-of-week discussion board – a short response paper about the week. Read what some of your peers have posted and reply to two of them by Monday. My intention is that the discussion boards can be a place where you share your findings, discoveries, and insights with one another.

**Attendance:** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each synchronous class meeting. You are expected to arrive on time, prepared to participate actively in discussion of the material. Reading and listening must be completed before each class, as listed on the schedule on Canvas.

**Note:** We will *only* have synchronous class meetings on Tuesdays, unless otherwise stated on the schedule.

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 Board:** Students are expected to actively participate, both in class and on the discussion boards. Your contributions are crucial to the success of this class. Discussion involves listening to and engaging with your fellow students, alongside contributing your questions, comments, and thoughts. Participation constitutes an actual grade and will be calculated according to the following criteria:

A: You contribute 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 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.

C: You contribute 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.

D: You contribute 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.

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:** I value quality over quantity in your posts. I consider how your interactions help create a communal space for a lively and multifaceted discussion. To this end, please explain and clarify your arguments and interpretations, citing specific passages in a text or a timestamp in a video. In responding to other students' posts, propose alternative readings, or extend their interpretation with more information. Your writing can be casual, but it must be grammatically correct and clear. I will not reply to everything you post, but I will read it.

**Thursday Posting (~200 words):** On most Thursdays, you will have a prompt. Unlike the Friday reflection, these prompts will be specific to the assigned materials. They will ask you to come up with your own examples, apply the concepts of the readings, or do your own interpretation. You will be required to post before you will be able to see your peers' responses.

**Friday Reflection (~250 words):** A weekly wrap-up, due on Fridays, will ask you to discuss required reading and/or listening assignments from the week. Engage with the materials from any angle you see fit. What discoveries or connections did you make? What do you agree or disagree with? What questions were raised for you? How does the reading apply to the music you enjoy? While demonstrating comprehension and thoughtful consideration of readings and listenings. I am interested in your thoughts, reactions, and interpretations. You will be required to post before you will be able to see your peers' responses.

**Monday Responses (50-100 words x2):** By the following Monday, you are required to post two (2) replies to your peers' discussion board posts – either the Thursday or Friday boards. The purpose of the online discussion boards is to encourage active engagement with the course materials, as well as to spark and sustain the productive exchange of ideas within a learning community of peers. It is imperative to remain respectful of all viewpoints and positions. The goal is to have rich conversation – not just posting a basic answer to my prompts. Part of your responsibility is to ask additional questions that may take the conversation to new places.

**Presentation:** Each student will give a 5-minute presentation based upon their final project research. Presentations will take place during class time on Thursday, 11/19 and Tuesday, 11/24. You are welcome to do your presentation “live” or create and present a pre-recorded video. Guidelines for this presentation to come.

**Final Paper (8-10 pages):** Design a research paper on a topic of your choice (related to music and humor), due the last day of finals week (12/8). Over the course of the quarter you will be asked to turn in research proposal, abstract, bibliography, and final paper. I invite you to look widely for a project topic and choose one that genuinely interests you. You're welcome to write about movies, mockumentaries, short films, sketches, comics, books, periodicals, songs, albums, music videos, TV (episodes, shows commercials), videogames, memes... or anything else in which you find compelling examples of music and humor. I'm glad to help you find a topic too. If you would like your final product to be something other than a written research paper, and you have an idea of what you'd like to do instead, let's talk.

**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](http://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 Canvas mail to share Zoom links, announcements, and any changes or clarifications to the reading, listening, or viewing assignments. Please check your email regularly for updates and contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

**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:** For our synchronous meetings, please use only the device(s) you need in order to be digitally present and engaged. I'll never ask you to turn your webcam on, but please be prepared to speak.

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**Important dates:**

Friday, October 16:	Project proposal due (1-2 paragraphs)
Friday, October 23:	Post your edited project proposal (1-2 paragraphs) & give peer feedback
Friday, November 6:	Project abstract (1-2 pages) and draft bibliography due
Thursday November 19 & 24:	5-minute presentations
Tuesday, December 8:	Final paper due (8-10 pages)

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## **Week 1 – Introduction**

Thursday, 9/17: First class meeting, introductions

## **Week 2 – Conceptualizing Music; Theorizing Humor**

Tuesday, 9/22: Kendall L. Walton, “Understanding Humor and Understanding Music”  
John Morreall, “No Laughing Matter” (excerpt)

Thursday, 9/24: Annie Gérin, “A Second Look at Laughter: Humor in the Visual Arts”

## **Week 3 – Musical Humor**

Tuesday, 9/29: Peter Kay, “Music and Humor: What’s So Funny?”  
Leonard Bernstein, “Humor in Music”

Thursday, 10/1: David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (excerpts)

## **Week 4 – Classical Jokes**

Tuesday, 10/6: David J. Buch, Mozart’s Bawdy Canons, Vulgarity and Debauchery at the Wiednertheater

Thursday, 10/8: Gretchen A. Wheelock, *Haydn’s Ingenious Jestings with Art* (excerpts)

## **Week 5 – Genre & Parody**

Tuesday, 10/13: Yayoi Uno Everett, “Parody with an Ironic Edge: Dramatic Works by Kurt Weill, Peter Maxwell Davies, and Louis Andriessen”

Thursday, 10/15: Anne Beggs, “For Urinetown is Your Town...”

Friday, 10/16: Paper proposal due

## **Week 6 – Irony & Satire**

Tuesday, 10/20: Lori Kendall, “‘White and Nerdy’: Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype”  
Lily Hirsch, “The Prince of Pop Parody”

Thursday, 10/22: Loren Kajikawa, “ ‘My Name Is’: Signifying Whiteness, Rearticulating Race”  
OR  
Charles Hiroshi Garrett, “‘Pranksta Rap’: Humor as Difference in Hip hop”

Friday, 10/23: Post your edited paper proposal & give peer feedback

## **Week 7 – Race, Ethnicity, Gender**

Tuesday, 10/27: Joseph Boskin and Joseph Dorinson, “Ethnic Humor: Subversion and Survival”  
Joanne R. Gilbert, *Performing Marginality: Humor, Gender, and Cultural Critique* (excerpts, part I)

Thursday, 10/29: Michael Pickering, "Race, Gender, and Broadcast Comedy"  
Joanne R. Gilbert, *Performing Marginality: Humor, Gender, and Cultural Critique* (excerpts, part 2)

### **Week 8 – The Carnavalesque + Film Music**

Tuesday, 11/3: Karen Bettez Halnon, "Heavy Metal Carnival and Dis-alienation: The Politics of Grotesque Realism"

Thursday, 11/5: Daniel Goldmark, "Sounds Funny/Funny Sounds: Theorizing Cartoon Music"

Friday, 11/6: Abstract and draft bibliography due

### **Week 9 – Film Music**

Tuesday, 11/10: Miguel Mera, "Is Funny Music Funny? Contexts and Case Studies of Film Music Humor"

Thursday, 11/12: Jeff Smith, "Popular Songs and Comic Allusion in Contemporary Cinema"

### **Week 10 – New Media + Presentations**

Tuesday, 11/17: Limor Shifman, "An Anatomy of a YouTube Meme"

Thursday, 11/19: Presentations (day 1 of 2)

### **Week 11 – Presentations**

Tuesday, 11/24: Presentations (day 2 of 2)

### **Thanksgiving Break**

Wednesday, 11/25: Thanksgiving vacation begins

Thursday, 11/26: Thanksgiving Day

### **Finals Week**

Wednesday, 12/2: Fall examinations begin

Tuesday, 12/8: Fall examinations end

Tuesday, 12/8: Final papers due 12/8 by 11:59 PM