Unit 1 Project: Blues and Tin Pan Alley Compositions

Project description

As we learn about the early music industry, you will be listening to many examples of different musical genres popular at that time. Many of these will sound familiar within the music you hear today as the forms and styles are always coming back into vogue.

For this project, you will write two sets of lyrics to model the blues and verse/refrain forms that were common throughout this era. You will share your drafts with your group and have an opportunity to revise them before submission. You also have the option of recording yourself or a friend singing (either with or without accompaniment) for extra credit. Singing ability doesn't count, don't worry. More information about that below.

Objectives

Through this project, you will:

- Develop listening skills as you listen carefully to models for form, content, and rhyme patterns;

- Create new songs based on the patterns that you hear throughout the course thus far; and

- Experience engaging with music in some new ways, as a songwriter and (if you do the extra credit) a performer.

Directions

Like all of our projects, this is a multi-step process. Each stage has its own deadlines, listed in the calendar.

FIRST SUBMISSION: First, you will need to prepare and do some research by listening to examples of blues and Tin Pan Alley songs.

1. Check the course calendar and note the project deadlines.

2. Review the lecture materials on form, with special attention to blues form and the standard verse/refrain form seen in Tin Pan Alley.

3. Listen closely to the course examples, especially those that are specifically from the blues and Tin Pan Alley traditions. Try and determine the forms using As, Bs, and Cs as I demonstrate in the lectures. Many will line up with the standard forms, but some will do something slightly different. You can

also listen widely to other blues or Tin Pan Alley songs—don't feel confined to the small playlist for this course! You may find some creative inspiration.

4. Write your own songs. You will do two: one will follow blues form while the other will follow Tin Pan Alley form. The blues song will have five stanzas.[1] Your Tin Pan Alley song will include one verse and one refrain.[2] Pay careful attention to the rhyme scheme and any repetition that is part of the standard form. You can deviate from the standard form as long as you base your song's form on a song from the same genre (blues or TPA) from the same era (you cannot base your TPA song on Taylor Swift, for example). Keep links to any example songs as you will need them in the next step.

5. Write a short essay (between 300-400 words) in which you give the form of two songs that you used as a model for these lyrics in which you describe the tone and the effectiveness of metaphor or innuendo, interpret the emotional content conveyed in the composed lyrics (what is the songwriter trying to convey?), and describe how metaphor or other lyrical techniques furthered the effectiveness of the song. Use specific references linking the text to any musical bits that are mutually reinforcing the main idea.

6. Copy your songs and short essay into the group discussion board for peer review. Include the titles and try to keep them formatted in a way that makes it easy to read your form. Provide links to Spotify or YouTube for the songs whose form you base your songs on. Make sure to submit your songs to your group's discussion board by the first submission deadline in the calendar.

PEER REVIEW: The second stage of the project is for peer review and revision.

1. Soon after the final submission deadline, return to your group's submission forum and comment on AT LEAST two of your group members' songs. For each comment, provide at least one positive critique and AT LEAST one suggestion for improvement. Feedback should address the formal structure of the texts, the efficacy of achieving the lyrical goals as outlined by your peers' essay, and any suggestions for improving the submitted lyrics. Be sure to complete these comments by the peer review deadline posted in the calendar.

---

[1] A stanza is one set of poetic text, one verse. In the blues, for example, one stanza is comprised of three lines. Determining the form of those three lines is part of your assignment. Five stanzas of three lines each, therefore, would mean that your blues song should have fifteen lines.

[2] I don't discuss the standard verse form in the lecture since they vary greatly. You will need to listen closely to examples, discern the forms, and choose a song to copy for your own verse.

FINAL SUBMISSION: The third stage involves your preparation for final submission.

1. Review your peers' work and comments, thinking critically about which ones you would like to incorporate into your work.

2. Make any revisions to your lyrics and essay.

3. Submit your revised lyrics and essay, with links to your examples, using the Final Submission tool.

Extra credit is available for those who want to sing your songs and submit a recording. Some procedures and notes on that process:

1. Singing ability does not count. Playing an instrument will not count. Extra credit is granted simply for being willing to sing your songs and share them.

2. To receive extra credit, record yourself singing the song (with or without accompaniment… which can range from playing with a backing band to banging out a groovy rhythm on your table). You can use a webcam through Kaltura (Blackboard's media system) or YouTube. Either embed the video or audio file following the directions in the course introduction or provide a link to its home on YouTube, SoundCloud or some other similar site.

Grades will be based on adherence to the formal structures described in the course lectures and as modeled in listening examples as well as on the thoughtful responses of the essays according to the given competencies rubric. The score breakdown is as follows:

40%	Formal accuracy to the given examples (repetition of lines and adherence to rhyme scheme)
30%	Lyrical analysis in the short essay (graded according to rubrics provided in the syllabus)
10%	Met first submission deadline (including both complete song texts, essay, and links to examples)
20%	Made quality comments on peers' first submissions (graded according to rubrics provided in the syllabus)
(10%)	Potential extra credit (this is all or nothing: if you submit something, you will get the extra credit)