

## MUS 210 Histories of Popular Music and Rock SYLLABUS Summer 2009

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This course will present American popular music after 1950 by focusing on the specific ingredients of musical styles, and relating those styles to broader social constructs. The course will also focus on the problem of writing a history of anything – what gets in, what gets left out and why? While the subject is music, critical thinking is the major methodical emphasis of the course.

**Required textbook:** *Rockin' Out; Popular Music in the USA*, Reebee Garofalo, fourth edition, Pearson Prentice-Hall, 2008.

**Websites & Internet use:** The textbook website is useful:

[http://wps.prenhall.com/hss\\_garafalo\\_rockinout\\_4/](http://wps.prenhall.com/hss_garafalo_rockinout_4/)

The class website will be a simple archive of class materials, such as this syllabus:

<http://www.smccd.net/accounts/mecklerd/MUS210/MUS210.htm>

Other class materials (listening examples) will be posted on the WebAccess site for this class:

<http://smccd.mrooms.net>, log in using your G number and 6-digit birth date, MMDDYY, no spaces or hyphens.

Check your student email account at least twice a week. While hard copy is preferred for assignments, if you do submit assignments via email, paste the text into the body of your email, and use your last name as the first part of the file name in any attachments. (for example, a student named Janis Joplin would name an attachment as "joplin\_assessment3.doc")

**Reading assignment** -- read the entire book; it can be boring, so plan on about 25 pages a day to keep it manageable.

**Homework assignments** -- every Monday, turn in an assessment of three songs from the era covered in class the previous week. (The timing of this assignment will be changed on the final weeks.) Each song assessment will be worth 10 points. Each assessment should cover musical aspects of the song, poetic and formal aspects of the lyrics, and the song's significance should be related to broader questions of genre and social history. Why did you choose it? Historians usually like to choose examples that are the first, the best, most typical, most popular and influential, traits that and don't always come together in the same example. How does your example rate in those categories? What class, race or gender issues might be associated with your example? Can any of these broader issues of social context and be tied to specific musical details? Where does the song fall in the pop-rock continuum? Musical specifics to note are tempo (fast or slow?), rhythmic feel (backbeat, syncopation, swing, duple or triple subdivision, four-on-the-floor?), harmony (usual or unusual, simple or complex?), form (usual or unusual? All four-bar phrases or something different?), timbre (sound characteristics of instruments and singing style), and the texture (layers of sound).

### Final assignment (no final examination)

1. Select five songs and one album that can be used to summarize the history of popular music since 1950. Explain your choices in detail and describe what currents are reflected in your examples, with an emphasis on musical traits. Briefly criticize your list, mentioning what is left out or in what ways it is imbalanced. 130 points. You may reuse and refine the song assessments that you have created during the course for this final project. Personal statements of taste are strongly encouraged, but this is not to be a simply a list of your five favorite songs.
2. Write a brief essay on these questions: "Music reflects society; can it *change* society? Does music inevitably reflect society?" Draw on the textbook for your evidence and examples. 20 pts.

The final grade will be based on the percentage earned of total possible points (270). Standard grading percentages apply (A = 90%). Additional quizzes and assignments, such as in-class film study guides, may be assigned.

**Attendance** is absolutely vital. The book leans towards the social side of the music; class will emphasize the musical side of the music, material best covered in lecture. The song assessments will Please no late arrival, early departure, sleeping in class, doing non-course related computer work or reading non-course related materials in class. Miss a class for a good reason? You are the judge, but only WRITTEN excuses are recorded. It is your responsibility to drop the class if you miss more than 4 class meetings. Late work will be accepted only two meetings after the due date, with a 10% penalty; after that, 50%. The first assignment will not be accepted late at all. Period.

### **Extra Credit**

Recognizing that life events interfere with perfect class attendance, extra credit may be earned by attending performances, lectures, concerts, etc. and writing a 3-page report about it. The extra credit activity must be approved by me in advance IN WRITING – use e-mail. It can be used to replace one song assessment.

### **Academic Integrity = Personal Integrity**

You must do your own work unless specified. Severe penalties, outlined in the Student Handbook, will be used in case of cheating or copied work without proper attribution. Plagiarism will result in zero points awarded for the assignment. Never write about music that you have not heard as if you have heard it. Site all sources in your work; for the textbook, just the page number will do, but please give full citations to books and websites. Even if you are paraphrasing and not quoting exactly your source, it should be cited.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

SLO 1 – Students will identify in musical terms key stylistic traits of various genres of popular music.

SLO 2 – Students will analyze the role of popular music in society, especially with regard to expressions of social conflict and identity.

SLO 3 – Students will construct a personal canon of songs, critically evaluating expressive content, expressive means, and connection to the history of the relevant genres.

### **Assessing Song Assessments**

A+ = engaging, vivid, personal; a novel or surprising creative approach

A = well-organized and thorough; unique personal observations; a good mix of big ideas and supporting details

B = good content but not well-organized or with several incorrect uses of music terminology

C = too short; lacking in personal points of view; few details, many incorrect uses of music terminology

D = poor writing obscures whatever point you are trying to make; not internally consistent (self-contradictory) but at least some evidence that you did listen and think!

F = much better for your average than a zero.