MUSIC 2734A (ANALYSIS OF POPULAR MUSIC)

HIT RECORDS: LYRICS, STYLES, MIXING

Dr R. Toft, TC 114, ext. 85104
Monday, 1:30-3:30, TC 202 / Thursday, 2:30-3:30, TC 201

COURSE DESCRIPTION
A study of the techniques songwriters, performers, and producers in the 1960s employed to create effective verbal and musical arguments in a variety of genres, focusing on the structural elements of lyrics and music, performing styles, and arrangement (mixing).

CONTENT AND TEACHING PHILOSOPHY
This course, designed to help students hone their skills in aural analysis, investigates top-40 songs recorded in the 1960s from the perspective of the critical listener. It introduces foundational terms and concepts and takes as its starting point the notion that training in popular music should include a component that enables students to acquire a technical understanding of the sonic material on recordings (the song itself, as well as its recorded version). Participants will gain entry to the soundscape of 1960s pop/rock through the ears of recordists (songwriters, arrangers, band members, producers, and engineers), and by the end of the semester, students should be able not only to identify and label with appropriate academic terminology many of the technical parameters of recorded sound but also to discuss the expressive flow of a track. Succeeding generations of recordists have been heavily influenced by the classic sounds developed by Fender and Gibson in the 1950s and 1960s and by the sonic creations of luminaries such as Phil Spector and George Martin, and the techniques and concepts acquired in Music 2734 are transferable to other genres and the work of more recent artists.

One of the fundamental purposes of a university education is to challenge students to think differently about the subject at hand, and this course follows that guiding principle. In other words, if instructors do not make students feel intellectually uncomfortable, they have not been successful. So, please be receptive to new ideas, terminology (most of which will be quite foreign), and ways of thinking/working. This course applies critical thinking to the practices of recordists in order to increase sensitivity to the subtleties of a recording’s sonic surface.

ORGANIZATION & OUTCOMES
Most of the lectures will be used to establish a technical foundation for listening and its related academic terminology, but the latter part of the course will be reserved for student presentations on the sonic characteristics of specific recordings from the 1960s. Through individual projects presented to the class, students will demonstrate their understanding of the inner workings of songs and recordings, so that the specific knowledge and listening skills acquired in the first part of the course can be used to evaluate and explain to others the strategies songwriters and recordists employ to create recordings.

COURSE MATERIALS
Required text:
– available in the bookstore

ASSESSMENT
60% Two mid-term Tests (probably early October and early November) – 30% each
40% Class presentation on a selected track from the 1960s (during the final weeks of the term)

Note: In order to pass 2734, participants must attend all the student presentations (attendance will be taken during this part of the course).
ATTENDANCE
Not everything covered in the lectures is included in the text for the course, and students will acquire much of the framework necessary for listening to and discussing recordings through material presented in class. Regular attendance is encouraged as part of the preparation for tests.

CONSULTATION
I am available for consultation outside class by appointment. Please see me either before or after class to arrange a time. I prefer to conduct business ‘in person’ rather than by e-mail, and I do not answer questions about course content by e-mail. On the rare occasion that a student misses a lecture for legitimate and medically documented reasons, I will provide assistance with course material, but please be advised that I do not give private summaries of lectures. Students should rely on their peers to gather, and understand, material from classes they miss. See me only to clarify what you and your peers cannot grasp independently.

PROTOCOL
Cell phones are not permitted in class, and the use of personal listening devices (iPod, etc.) is prohibited.

PREREQUISITE
Music 1650a/b
Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from the course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

NON-MEDICAL AND MEDICAL ABSENCES / MENTAL HEALTH
Students are responsible for making up any missed classes or assignments as soon as possible. In order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing more than 30% of the student’s overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation in the form of a completed and appropriately signed Student Medical Certificate (SMC) indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities, or the equivalent documentation for non-medical or compassionate grounds.

Students seeking academic consideration must communicate with their instructors no later than 24 hours after the end of the period covered by either the self-reported absence or SMC, or immediately upon their return following a documented absence, to clarify how they will be expected to fulfil the academic expectations they may have missed during the absence. Documentation, if required, shall be submitted to the Office of the Associate Dean, Undergraduate (TC210).

Note that the new Self-Reporting Absence Portal may not be used for requesting academic relief for work worth more than 30%, or for Final Exams scheduled during the official examination period.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health @ Western https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES
Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoffence.pdf.

PLAGIARISM
Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing, such as, footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).
**Course Outline**

I. Introduction
   - textual criticism of songs and recordings
   - tasks involved in making records
   - the elements of a recording’s sensory surface
   - the four dimensions of a recording

II. The Song
   1. Lyrics: Telling a Story (Text: Chapter 1)
      - the creation of a story and the technical devices used to enrich the telling of that story
      - song form as derived from lyric structure
   2. Prosodic Tunes (Text: Chapter 2)
      - discussion of melodic line from the perspective of prosody and the natural delivery of words
      - differentiation of verse, chorus, and bridge
      - melodic style as a function of vocal delivery
   3. Harmonic Style: Guitar-Based Modalities (Text: Chapter 3)
      - harmonic style of pop/rock placed in a modal framework derived from guitar practices
      - harmonic rhythm

III. The Recorded Work
   1. Intros and Outros
      - sonic signatures
   2. Differentiation of Verse, Chorus, and Bridge
      - a sectional approach to sonic identity
   3. Performing Styles
      a. Vocal (Text: Chapter 4)
         - the central focus of a recording is often the vocal track
         - the expressive style of singing in pop/rock
         - consideration of timbre, register, grammatical/rhetorical phrasing, vibrato, legato/staccato,
           portamento, messa di voce, accent & emphasis, and imperceptible appoggiaturas
      b. Instrumental
         - guitar: timbral properties
            picks: single coil—Stratocaster, Telecaster
                  humbucker—Les Paul
            amps: American tweed vs British stack
            mics: type and placement
   4. Signal Processing
      - reverberation, compression, double tracking, chorus, flanging, vocoder, gate, etc.

IV. Expressive flow (the creation and release of emotional/musical tension)
   1. Invention and Arrangement (Text: Chapter 5)
      - assembling a musical discourse from disparate sources to create a hit
      - the activities of recordists from within the context of rhetorical criticism
   2. Transforming a Demo (Text: Chapter 6)
      - the art of turning an unpretentious demo into a powerful musical discourse
      - the distribution of ideas and instruments within the mix, as well as performance style and
        narrative flow
3. Hit and Miss (Text: Chapter 7)
   • the full potential of a song is realized only when the elements of a recording’s sonic surface maximize the emotional impact of a song
   • the deficiencies of a miss and the strategies employed in a hit
   • case study: ‘(They Long to Be) Close to You’, Bacharach (Richard Chamberlain—1963 & Dionne Warwick—1964) and the Carpenters (1970)

V. Notable Producers and Their Work
1. Phil Spector and the ‘Wall of Sound’
   • Spector’s method of working
   • Spector’s influence: Brian Wilson, Bruce Springsteen, Jim Steinman
2. George Martin & The Beatles: from ‘live’ to ‘studio’ and back
   • Martin’s approach to recording in the early 1960s
   • multi-tracking and increasing complexity in the recording process
   • return to the ‘live’ ethos and Spector’s involvement in *Let It Be*

VI. Student Presentations on Selected Tracks
   • application of analytical techniques developed in the course to various top-40 tracks from the 1960s