

## MUSIC 2734A

# HIT RECORDS: LYRICS, STYLES, MIXING

Dr R. Toft, TC 114, ext. 85104

Term 1 – Monday, 1:30-3:30, TC 201 / Thursday, 2:30-3:30, TC 204

### 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. 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:

Robert Toft, *Hits and Misses: Crafting Top 40 Singles, 1963-1971*. New York: Continuum, 2011

• available in the UWO Bookstore or online as an e-book: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/hits-and-misses-9781441116857/>

### ASSESSMENT

- 66 2/3% Two mid-term Tests (1st week of October and 1st week of November during the 2-hour class)
  - each worth 33 1/3% of the final mark
- 33 1/3% Class presentation on a selected track from the 1960s (during the final 2 weeks of the term)
  - worth 33 1/3% of the final mark

***Also see the section on class attendance below***

## CLASS 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 essential as part of the preparation for tests and the class presentation.

***Attendance will be taken from 17 September 2021, and 5% of the final mark will be deducted for every part or full class missed (the 2-hour time slot consists of 2 separate classes), unless appropriate medical documentation has been submitted to the Dean's Office.***

## CONSULTATION

I am available for consultation outside class by appointment. Please contact me to arrange a time for a Zoom session. I prefer not to conduct course business by email, and I do not answer questions about course content by email. 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.

## MASKING GUIDELINES

***Students will be expected to wear triple layer, non-medical, paper masks at all times in the classroom*** as per University policy and public health directives. Students who are unable to wear a mask must seek formal accommodation through Western Accessible Education, and present medical documentation.

***Students are not permitted to eat or drink while in class to ensure masks stay in place.*** Students will be able to eat and drink outside of the classroom during scheduled breaks.

Students unwilling to wear a mask (or not wearing the mask so as to cover the nose and mouth) as stipulated by Western policy and public health directives will be referred to the Dean, and such actions will be considered a violation of the student Code of Conduct.

***Students in violation of the mask mandate will be asked to leave the classroom.***

## OTHER PROTOCOLS

Cell/mobile phones are prohibited in the classroom at all times, as they are high-touch surfaces.

## PREREQUISITE

Music 1651a/b or the former Music 1650a/b

Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this 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.

## GRADING SCALE

A+ = 90-100%, A = 80-89%, B = 70-79%, C = 60-69%, D = 50-59%, F = 0-49%.

## ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION FOR STUDENT ABSENCE

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. **Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus.** Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are not met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate

grounds for the absence in question. **Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.**

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office. For the Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/Academic\\_Consideration\\_for\\_absences.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic_Consideration_for_absences.pdf)

and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

### **COURSE ABSENCES DUE TO DAILY COVID SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE**

Missed assessments (e.g., presentations, essays, quizzes, tests, midterms, etc.) require formal academic considerations (typically self-reported absences and/or academic counselling). Methods for dealing with missed work and course content are at the discretion of the instructor(s). Students should be aware that some learning outcomes cannot be easily made up and may need to be completed in a subsequent year. Your instructor will provide you with further information as to how this applies within this course.

Students who demonstrate a pattern of routinely missing coursework due to self-reported COVID symptoms, and therefore do not demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes of the course, will not receive credit for the course.

### **ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION FOR MISSING WORK**

In cases where students are unable to submit work due to medical illness or compassionate grounds, if an online self-reported absence is submitted, or if appropriate supporting documentation is submitted to the Associate Dean's office, and the accommodation is granted, then the missed assessments may be rescheduled or discounted in the calculation of the final grade for the course, at the discretion of the instructor. If neither a self-reported absence nor an appropriate supporting document is submitted to the appropriate office, then the missed assignments will receive a grade of zero.

### **ACADEMIC OFFENCES**

Submission of work with which you have received help from someone else (other than the course instructor or TA) is an example of plagiarism, which is considered a major academic offence. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, as found at:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS**

Students that are in emotional/mental distress should refer to the Health and Wellness at Western page (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help or to go to the Wellness Education Centre located in UCC room 76. **Students in crisis in need of immediate care are directed to go directly to Student Health Services in UC11 or to click on the green "I Need Help Now" button on the Health and Wellness page above.**

### **ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students work with Accessible Education Western (AEW, formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation\\_disabilities.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf)

### **RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their

course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

<http://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>

### **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).

### **CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR AN IN-PERSON CLASS PIVOTING TO 100% ONLINE LEARNING**

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor. In the event that online learning is required, a stable internet connection with working microphone and webcam will be required. As has been the case in the past, the decision to pivot to online learning will be made by Western, and not individual instructors or departments (excepting temporary online instruction in the event of instructor illness).

### **EXAMINATIONS & ATTENDANCE**

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

### **ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN EXAMS**

Electronic devices of any type will not be permitted during Midterm Tests and/or Final Exam in this course (unless required for accessibility reasons based on an approved accommodation request from Accessible Education).

### **ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASSROOMS**

The in-class use of electronic devices (other than for instructor-approved in-class uses) is expressly prohibited. Students found guilty of disrupting the class with electronic devices will be asked to leave the class and may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

### **COMPUTER-MARKED MULTIPLE-CHOICE TESTS OR EXAMS**

These may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

## 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
      - pickups: 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
  - case study: 'Laughing', The Guess Who (1969)
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
  - case study: 'Behind Blue Eyes', The Who (1971)
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