

Mus 9547a – Making Popular Music

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Meetings: Tuesdays online via zoom (meeting invitation posted weekly to owl)

A hands-on study of common practice “laptop era” record production techniques, including cloud-based songwriting modalities, tracking, signal processing, sample creation and curation, mixing, mastering, distribution, and so on. We will situate our work in this class within a newly emerging paradigm in popular music studies, namely, so-called “creative reflective practice,” most evident now in the *Perspectives in Popular Music Production* series published through Focal/Routledge. In this work, focus shifts from artefacts (ie., records and songs) to the creative processes through which those artefacts emerge; and researchers are encouraged to encounter, and reflect upon, those processes *directly*. “Being a reflective practitioner,” Linda Candy (2019: 11) explains, “means cultivating the many ways we can learn through experience.” This course is devoted entirely to helping scholars learn to facilitate this process. Coursework culminates in the creation of a 3-5 minute demonstration recording. Prior experience making music is neither assumed nor required.

Course Outcomes

Students will understand, recognize and reproduce common practice “laptop era” record production techniques, including cloud-based songwriting modalities, tracking, signal processing, sample creation and curation, mixing, mastering, distribution, and so on. They will also be able to situate this work within the emerging “creative reflective practice” paradigm of popular music studies, most evident in the *Perspective in Popular Music Production* series published through Focal/Routledge.

Evaluation

Art Experiment, pt. 1: Weekly Art Upload (30%): Given that we are here to study music making in a university setting, it will be easy to forget that we are, in fact, interested in learning everything we can in this class about a kind of creativity. Every artistic pursuit should be considered thus, in my opinion. However, music is, in my experience, the least likely of the arts to be taken up as anything more than an assemblage of coolly technical operations. Most books on musical creativity take on the appearance of an operations manual, filled with indecipherable technical diagrams and instructions. Painting and (sometimes) photography, on the other hand, are often considered in overtly creative terms. The “technical means,” in these pursuits, tend to be treated as something that artists will develop on their own, and at their own pace, without any need for much elucidation (this said, photography has its share of “how to” manuals). What matters for artists and theorists alike in these idioms is that artists direct all of their energy to nurturing their ability to *remain* creative throughout the inevitable artistic droughts and boons of an entire career. Painting and photography, in other words, tend to place creativity as *the* fundamental skill, all that is worth studying and developing; technique is always an ultimately unstandardizable, if not wholly personalized, way to engage that skill. If you like art or photography, the argument runs, you’ll develop your technique over time (and maybe even in technical classes at art college), but technique is only ever really a means to an end, and it should never be treated as anything more. There’s paint, paintbrushes, palettes, canvases, and so on; and then there is the art those things are combined to create. It’s the latter, mostly, which is valued in the end.

As an experiment in nurturing creativity, especially in this usually stifling environment (ie., at university, where the pianos in professors’ offices sometimes serve more as makeshift bookshelves than musical instruments), we are going to engage a visual art alongside our music making. I hope, in fact, that we will learn to nurture a lifelong love for a newfound hobby

in doing this. Please choose a visual arts discipline that you are interested in, and which you know very little about, or, at least, that you have very little experience making. In the absence of technical milestoneing, of the sort that conservatories and universities love to test for, we will simply ply our adopted crafts and see where this experiment takes us. The lessons you learn while making, and reading about making, art will help you to nurture and grow your creativity in musical areas. This is all graded on a pass/fail system, so don't worry about being any "good" at your art. In fact, I hope that this process will help you go beyond "good" and "evil" in art, since no empirical referent (nor any particular use) for such values exist.

Each week, you will post one work of visual art to the forum labelled "Art Salon" online, by Sunday at 5pm. Absinthe is optional, but recommended when touring the salon, which you'll need to do every week (part of this project is viewing work done by your peers as well). In fact, at least twice per semester, you will create a work of art in response to art posted by one of your peers. Please do not provide any explanation for what you post, aside from a title (when appropriate), and an indication when your work is done in response to another's (just let us know which one you are responding to, but say nothing more), and try not to ask any questions of what you see beyond: do I enjoy this?, does this engage me?, what do I feel right now looking at this thing? Only post *your own* work. This is a forum for sharing, and responding to, art made by yourself and your peers. The experiment is meant to be fun, and to clarify your own creative process.

Final Project (70%): A 3-5 minute recording of an original song, in any genre (though chillhop or some other electronic genre is encouraged for any newbies), which demonstrates your understanding of common practice "laptop era" record production techniques. Further details TBD as a group, in class, together.

Required Materials

Jay Hodgson, *Understanding Records*, 2nd ed. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019.

David Barnes & Ted Orland, *Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*. Eugene: Continuum. 2000.

Carolyn Schlam, *The Creative Path A View From The Studio on the Making of Art*. New York: Allworth Press. 2018 (optional)

Lynda Videos. Students enrolled at Western have free access to a wealth of useful videos which are available online, free of charge, at: <https://www.uwo.ca/projects/lyndacom/> Because we do not have access to TC 200 this year due to Covid-19 restrictions, students will use any number of different workstations they have available to them, whether it be PreSonus through www.splice.com, which can be rented online, or one they have on their own system. I will work with each to find a suitable series of "how to" videos which will provide the basic information needed to engage in the "laptop era" record production we study in this class.

splice.com/home: students will need to purchase a monthly subscription to splice.com for this class. It runs \$8 per month, as of this writing.

Topics/Outline

15 September

Intro to the course and the course concept (1 week)
Tour of Splice & Workstation Paradigm
Some Notes on the Ontology of Recorded Sound

22-29 September (*Understanding Records: Intro & Chapter 1*)

Making Popular Music
Songwriting, Pre-Production & Tracking

6-13 October (*Understanding Records: Chapter 2, up to "signal processing"*)

Mixing Popular Music

20 October - 17 November (*Understanding Records, from "signal processing"*)

Signal Processing

24 November (*Understanding Records, Chapter 3 & Coda*)

Mastering

1 December

Distribution, Marketing & Streaming

8 December

Course Roundup

General Notes

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

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

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

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>

Covid-19 Notes

i) **Contingency Plan:** 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 at the discretion of the course instructor.

ii) **Recording of Online Activities:** All of the remote learning sessions for this course will be recorded. The data captured during these recordings may include your image, voice recordings, chat logs and personal identifiers (name displayed on the screen). The recordings will be used for educational purposes related to this course, including evaluations. The recordings may be disclosed to other individuals participating in the course for their private or group study purposes. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns related to session recordings.

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor.

iii) **Online Etiquette:** Some components of this course may involve synchronous online interactions. To ensure the best experience for both you and your classmates, please honour the following rules of etiquette:

- Use your computer and/or laptop if possible (as opposed to a cell phone or tablet)
- "Arrive" to class on time
- Ensure that you are in a private location to protect the confidentiality of discussions in the event that a class discussion deals with sensitive or personal material
- To minimize background noise, kindly mute your microphone for the entire class until you are invited to speak, unless directed otherwise
- Unless invited by your instructor, do not share your screen in the meeting
- Be prepared to turn your video camera off at the instructor's request if the internet connection becomes unstable

The course instructor will act as moderator for the class and will deal with any questions from participants. To participate please consider the following:

- If you wish to speak, select the blue “raise hand” function and wait for the instructor to acknowledge you before beginning your comment or question.
- Kindly remember to unmute your microphone and turn on your video camera before speaking.
- Self-identify when speaking.
- Kindly remember to select the “raise hand” function again to lower your hand, mute your mic and turn off your video camera after speaking (unless directed otherwise).

General considerations of “netiquette”:

- Keep in mind the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the course.
- Be courteous toward the instructor, your colleagues, and authors whose work you are discussing.
- Be respectful of the diversity of viewpoints that you will encounter in the class and in your readings. The exchange of diverse ideas and opinions is part of the scholarly environment.

Note that disruptive behaviour of any type during online classes, including inappropriate use of the chat function, is unacceptable. Students found guilty of “Zoom-bombing” a class, or of other serious online offenses, may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.