

STUDIES IN SONGWRITING

A Research-Creation Seminar

Music 9740b
Friday 9:30-12:30, TC340
January 2025

This seminar focuses on the practice of “pop” songwriting within the context of research-creation in music. The course embraces an approach to song composition that combines creative processes and academic practices to foster innovation and the development of knowledge through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. In other words, both the act of creating something novel and the processes, techniques, and methodologies belonging to a given field are central to research-creation. Artist-researchers are individuals whose work involves both the creation of art *and* the research that underpins creative activity. The outcome may be an object (e.g., a score) or something that exists over time (e.g., a recording, a video, a performance).

As artist-researchers, seminar participants will divide their time between research (on songwriting) and practice (composing songs). At the beginning of the semester, students will analyze two songs, one from their favourite genre and the other from an unfamiliar musical style, to discover the fundamental characteristics of both genres. This research will serve as preparation for writing an original song in each of the chosen styles. Lyrics, melody, and harmony will be considered in relation to the expressive flow of events across the “spans of meaning” that comprise the structures typical of songs identifiable as “popular” music.

In the first part of the term, participants will present the findings of their analyses to the seminar and will write a short, formal paper based on one of the analyses. They will then compose the two songs (in a workshop setting) across the remainder of the term. Everyone must be prepared to perform sections of their songs in the workshops (self accompanied) and to engage actively in constructive criticism of the material heard.

No previous experience in songwriting is expected. There are no required texts for the seminar. However, readings will be suggested in class, and the knowledge base for the analyses will be established in the first two meetings.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

- 20% Presentation of two analyses (weeks 3-6)
- 20% One formal paper based on one of the presentations – due week 8
- 60% Two songs submitted in recorded form (a simple recording in something like GarageBand, using the built-in mic of a computer, will suffice), plus a lead sheet (accurately notated vocal line, plus words and chord symbols) – due last day of classes