

Composing Feminisms in North America
Fall 2026
Thursdays 1.30pm-4.30pm

Instructor: Prof. Emily Abrams Ansari
Office hours: TC222, 2-4pm

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Course Description

What can feminist approaches bring to the study of music in North America? This course considers this question through three large unit topics, considering feminist approaches to musical works across genres, feminist approaches to music's place in society, and the impacts of intersectional feminist thinking on music historiography. Considering both foundational works of feminist musicology and music theory and more recent scholarship, our investigation is grounded in feminist theory from across the disciplines. A wide variety of music from this continent will be considered throughout the course, including popular music, jazz, traditional music, and Western classical music, while the scholarship we will consider comes from a wide array of scholarly approaches.

Addressing historic inequities in musicology while improving our writing for a general audience will be the central focus of this course's assessments. The bulk of your evaluation will be constituted around a Wikipedia assignment, in which you will create or improve the Wikipedia page of a significant female or non-binary musical figure and then reflect on that work.

Course Materials

All course materials will be provided by the instructor through our Brightspace page (<https://westernu.brightspace.com>). There are no anticipated costs for students.

The various stages of our Wikipedia assignment can be accessed through this link:

[https://dashboard.wikiedu.org/courses/University of Western Ontario/Composing Feminisms in North America \(Fall 2026\)?enroll=jykhunhw](https://dashboard.wikiedu.org/courses/University of Western Ontario/Composing Feminisms in North America (Fall 2026)?enroll=jykhunhw)

Method of Evaluation

Wikipedia Assignment*:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| - Peer review | 5% |
| - Main Wikipedia contribution | 50% |
| - 10 min presentation on your process and contributions | 10% |
| - Reflective essay | 15% |

Class attendance and participation (including leading 1 discussion) 20%

**Note: If you would prefer to write a traditional research essay on a topic related to this course, please come discuss this with me by October 1.*

Assignments/Tasks

1. *Wikipedia assignment.* Plus log in to the Wikipedia dashboard through the link above. All stages of this assignment are listed and described there.
2. *Class discussion leading.* Lead a discussion of one class reading during the term. This activity will make up part of your participation grade.

3. *Attendance and Participation:* This grade is informed by your attendance in class and the quality of your contributions to class discussion.

Course Timeline and Format

The class will meet throughout the semester following the schedule below. All classes will be in-person.

Graduate Course Learning Objectives

1. Students will increase their understanding of feminist thought and its application to music scholarship.
2. Students will improve their ability to read critically and synthesize scholarly writing for a non-expert reading.
3. Students will improve their presentation skills for a range of contexts.
4. Students will improve their ability to research and write for a general audience.

Enrolment Restrictions

Enrolment in this course is restricted to graduate students in Music, as well as any student who has obtained special permission from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

Statement on Academic 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/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf Note especially that plagiarism is a major scholastic offence. Students are expected to write all assignments in their own words. If you take an idea from another author, you must acknowledge this by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Health and Wellness Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Accessible Education Western (AEW)

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of

services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Wikipedia assignment site uses a tool to detect the use of generative AI, which is not allowed in Wikipedia articles. Information about this will be provided in week 2 of the assignment. Please do not rely on generative AI for bibliography gathering either, as it can hallucinate results, or omit significant contributions.

Class Environment

Especially as our class explores issues of gender and sexuality identity that are likely to have significant meaning for many in the class, it is essential that our classroom provides a safe and respectful environment where everyone can feel comfortable both asking questions and voicing their ideas. This being said, I also think that discomfort is often necessary as part of the learning process. There will be moments when we discuss difficult issues that you may not have addressed in previous courses. I expect each of you to come to class with empathy for others, an open mind, and the recognition that you have an ethical responsibility to those with whom you share our classroom space. If for any reason, you feel that the class is not providing you with the environment you need, please e-mail me or come see me immediately.

In addition to discussing experiences of gender and sexuality, the course will explore other material that you may find difficult, including sexual assault and racism. I am happy to talk about your reaction to course materials at any time. If you need to leave the class at any time because of your reaction to course materials, or wish to stay away for a particular class, please let me know. Take whatever time you need and talk to others, or me, if you think it will be helpful. Mental health resources are also available if needed (see above).

Other Course Policies

This course is all about discussion and **participation**. If you miss classes without notifying me or are silent in class, this grade will be affected. If you cannot attend class for a degree-related or medical reason, please let me know in advance. Please come to each class having carefully considered the material listed in the syllabus and with plenty of critical perspectives to share with your colleagues. I encourage lively debate in

class, so a wide variety of viewpoints will be very well received. I am always glad to hear opinions that differ from my own.

SCHEDULE

Sept. 10 - Introduction to Feminist Musicology

McClary, Susan. "Introduction." In *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis, 1991. 3-19.

Cusick, Suzanne. "On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex." In *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, edited by Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley. Carciofoli, 1999. 25-43.

Nalini Ghuman, "Inaudible voices: transnational feminism, music, and listening in our time of crisis." In *Research handbook on feminist political thought*, ed. Mary Caputi and Patricia Moynagh.

James, Robin. "Music and Feminism in the 21st Century." *Music Research Annual* 1: 1–25.

UNIT I: COMPOSING MUSICAL FEMINISMS – Feminist Takes on Musical Works

Sept. 17 – "Women's Work"

Wikipedia assignment: Get started on Wikipedia; journal writing, create a Wikipedia account

Class visitor: Olivia Valentine (Visual Artist; Performer in Textures in Conversation)

Ansari, Emily Abrams. "Domestic Crafts, "Women's Work," and the Feminist Minimalism of Ann Southam." *Women & Music* (forthcoming).

Bernstein, Tamara. "'Isn't That Life, in a Way: Trying to Accommodate Dissonance?'" Reflections on Lesbianism and the Life and Music of Ann Southam." *Circuit* no. 31, no. 1 (2021): 43–53.

"Iowa State University Visual Arts Professor Finds Music in Weaving Fabric":

<https://www.news.iastate.edu/news/iowa-state-university-visual-arts-professor-finds-music-weaving-fabric>

Peruse this website and come with questions for our visitor, who is one of the two collaborators: <https://betweensystemsandgrounds.com/>

September 18-20: Please attend as much as possible of [Music, Craft, and the Fibre Arts: Textures in Conversation](#), a festival-symposium Prof. Ansari is co-organizing at Western, which will feature numerous feminist perspectives. If you are willing and able to volunteer to help with the various events, please let me know.

Sept. 24 – Feminist Theory: A Brief Introduction

Wikipedia assignment: Generative AI training; fact verification assignment

McCann, Carole R., Seung-Kyung Kim, and Emek Ergun, *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*. Routledge, 2021:

- Introduction
- Chapter 12, Emi Koyama, "The Transfeminist Manifesto"
- Chapter 15, Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality"

DRAFT – FINAL VERSION AVAILABLE MID-AUGUST

- Chapter 42, Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”

Oct 1 - Feminist Music Theory

Wikipedia assignment: Evaluate Wikipedia assignment and exercise; “improving representation” and “keeping track of your work” modules; topic choosing assignment

Hisama, Ellie. “The question of climax in Ruth Crawford’s String Quartet, third movement, in *Gendering Musical Modernism: The music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. 12–34.

McClary, Susan. “This is Not a Story My People Tell: Musical Time and Space According to Laurie Anderson.” In *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. University of Minnesota Press, 1991. 132-147.

Listen to *Sound Expertise* podcast, Season 2, Episode 3 – “Diversifying Music Theory with Ellie Hisama”: <https://soundexpertise.org/diversifying-music-theory-with-ellie-hisama/>

Taylor, Timothy D. “The Gendered Construction of the Musical Self: The Music of Pauline Oliveros.” *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 385–393.

Oct. 8 – prof. away - to be rescheduled for earlier in the week - Lesbian Musicalities

Wikipedia assignment: Add a fact assignment, topic finalization exercise

Cusick, Suzanne G. “On A Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight,” In *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, edited by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary Thomas. Routledge, 2006.

Mockus, Martha. *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality*. Routledge, 2008. 1–16.

Jodie Taylor, “Lesbian Musicalities, Queer Strains and Celesbian Pop: The Poetics and Polemics of Women-Loving Women in Mainstream Popular Music.” In *Redefining Mainstream Popular Music*, edited by Sarah Baker, Andy Bennett, and Jodie Taylor. Routledge, 2013. 64–75.

Freeman, Cordelia. “Filming female desire: queering the gaze of pop music videos.” *Cultural Studies* vol. 34, no. 6 ((2020): 1007–32.

Oct. 10-18: Reading Week – no class

Unit 2: (RE)COMPOSING MUSIC CULTURE – Reassessing Musical Society

Oct. 22 - Sexual Violence

Wikipedia assignment: start drafting; read guides

Class guest: Jillian Rogers, University of Florida

Bloechl, Olivia. “Survivors’ Songs in Opera: What the Vulnerable Voice Can Do.” *Women & Music* 25 (2021): 33–54.

Cusick, Suzanne G. and Monica Hershberger, editors. “Sexual Violence in Opera: Scholarship, Pedagogy, and Production as Resistance.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol. 71, no. 1 (2018): READ ONLY “Introduction” 213–18, Hershberger 226–32, and Cusick 243–8.

Rogers, Jill. Book proposal for *On the Harm in Harmony: Trauma in 20th- and 21st-Century US Musical Institutions*. **This document is not be shared outside this class for any reason, as this is a work in progress.**

Oct. 29 - Pop and Contemporary Feminism

Wikipedia assignment: peer review

Cook, Susan C. “‘RESPECT (Find Out What It Means To Me)’: Feminist Musicology and the Abject Popular.” *Women & Music* 5 (2001): 140–45.

James, Robin. “Poptimism and Popular Feminism.” *Sounding Out!* (blog), September 17, 2018. <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2018/09/17/poptimism-and-popular-feminism/>

Baade, C. (2019). A Complicated Transformation: *BEYONCÉ*, “Blue,” and the Politics of Black Motherhood. *Popular Music and Society*, 42(1), 42–60

UNIT 3: (RE)COMPOSING MUSIC HISTORY – Intersectional Rewrites

Nov. 5 - Disability

Wikipedia assignment: respond to peer review

Class guest: Rena Roussin (Western Postdoctoral Fellow)

Readings TBC

Nov. 12 - Women as Patrons

Wikipedia assignment: moving work to Wikipedia

Locke, Ralph P. and Cyrilla Barr. “Introduction: Music Patronage as a Female-Centered Cultural Process.” In *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists Since 1860*, ed. Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr. University of California Press, 1997. 1–23.

Ege, Samantha. *South Side Impresarios: How Race Women Transformed Chicago’s Classical Music Scene*. University of Illinois Press, 2024. 1–22.

Oja, Carol J. “Women Patrons and Crusaders for Modernist Music: New York in the 1920s.” In *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists Since 1860*, ed. Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr. University of California Press, 1997. 237–61.

Elliott, Robin. *Counterpoint to a City: The First One Hundred Years of the Women’s Musical Club of Toronto*. ECW Press, 1997. 26–42.

Nov. 19 - Queering North American Musicology

Wikipedia assignment: Continue improving your article

Maus, Fred Everett. “Introduction.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, edited by Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley. Oxford University Press, 2022.

Goldin-Perschbacher, Shana. “Gay Country, TransAmericana, and Queer Sincerity.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, edited by Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley. Oxford University Press, 2022.

Lee, Gavin S. K. “Hermeneutic Limits; or, When Not to Theorize: Notes for Interpreting Our Phoenix by Trans Indigenous Mexican-American Composer Mari Esabel Valverde.” *Music Theory Spectrum* vol. 46, no. 2 (2024): 208–25.

Nov. 26 - Black Womanhood

Wikipedia assignment: Final article due Nov 27; prepare presentation; work on reflective essay

Ege, Samantha. “Listening for Florence ‘Bea’ Price.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Florence B. Price*, edited by Samantha Ege and Alexandra Kori Hill. Cambridge University Press, 2026. 9–26.

Wells, Christopher J. “‘A Dreadful Bit of Silliness’: Feminine Frivolity and Ella Fitzgerald’s Early Reception.” *Women & Music* 21 (2017): 43–65.

Pellegrini, Lara. “Separated at ‘Birth’: Singing and the History of Jazz.” In *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, edited by Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker. Duke University Press, 2008. 31–47.

Dec. 3 – Presentations

Reflective essay due December 11