

Pop Modernity: An Introduction to Popular Music Studies

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Thursdays, 1:30-4:20pm, FNB-2240
Office Hours: by Appointment via Zoom

Overview

This course explores how the history of twentieth century pop resonates with some of the central tensions and promises of modernity and how popular music studies has approached and understood these issues. Shifting ideas about the popular “mainstream” will be a particular focus as we explore core concerns, concepts, and debates in popular music studies. The course will address questions of musical industrialization and technological mediation, musical taste and audience segmentation, identity formation and cultural expression, among others. We will spend time listening closely to popular music texts in order to understand better the role of popular music in the experience of the modern social world. Students are therefore expected to set aside time each week for assigned listening that will be made available online, as well as the required reading. The course will develop student skills in making critical connections across musical/media texts and social/cultural/historical contexts. In so doing, we will expand our understanding of the history of Western media cultures from the twentieth into the twenty-first centuries, and thus better grasp how that history has shaped our experience of the present.

Course Objectives

- 1) To survey selected historical developments and media texts relating to the history of popular music in the twentieth century.
- 2) To understand the industrial, institutional and technological processes that shape popular musical experience.
- 3) To familiarize students with some of the foundational concepts and debates in popular music studies.
- 4) To develop critical and analytical abilities in relation to media cultures in general and to listening to recorded sound in particular.

Texts

Course readings may be in one of three places: on the web, in the “Resources” folder in OWL (<https://owl.uwo.ca/portal>), or as an electronic resource via UWO Libraries. (FYI: some things you can’t get full access to directly on the web are fully available via the Proxy function on the UWO Libraries website, such as the e-book of Eric Weisbard’s Top 40 Democracy). I encourage you to make sure you can access OWL immediately; if not, notify me asap. Required listening examples will also be found in the OWL “Resources” folder. Streaming URLs are listed below.

Further reading: Scholar.google.com is one of the best places to start looking for additional materials. There is also an on-line bibliography of critical writings on popular music studies, “Everyday I Write the Book,” that is a useful resource but which has not been recently updated: <http://www.comm.umn.edu/~grodman/biblio/biblio-front.html> The UWO Library catalogue also has several excellent online resources: the Proquest Entertainment Industry Magazine Archive includes trade journals such as Billboard and Variety along with popular music periodicals, and the “Rock’s Back Pages” database covers the history of rock criticism.

Evaluation

1) Attendance and Participation:

15% of final grade

I will take attendance at the start of each week's class. To get the most out of this course, you need to do the assigned readings, listen to assigned recordings, attend the lectures, and be prepared to discuss the issues at hand in class. I expect all students to come to class having read and thought about that week's readings. If you miss a lecture, it is your responsibility to secure notes from a classmate.

2) Singin' in the Rain (1952) Response Paper:

25% of final grade

4 double-spaced pages, MS Word .docx format ONLY (no .pdfs) Due via OWL @noon Feb. 10

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect upon your own experience of and response to a popular music text and to critical work on that text. The assignment involves being particularly sensitive to your own changing perceptions and experiences of a media text. A key objective is to use theoretical arguments in order to revisit and rethink your initial experience of a musical film. The assignment has a very specific, 2-step process that you must follow:

A) First, view Singin' in the Rain (1952), without having read the assigned article by Carol Clover. Write 2 double-spaced pages summarizing your experience viewing the film—what you enjoyed or found annoying or whatever, and why (but no plot summaries, please!). Since there is no right answer here, there is no advantage in peeking at the readings (that will actually make things harder!). Writing in first person singular is encouraged.

B) Second, read the "Dancin' in the Rain" article (do not read before having viewed film and recorded your own reactions). Then think about Clover's argument and write 2 double-spaced pages about how the the article did or did not affect your sense of the meaning and pleasure of the film, now (i.e., now you are to react to the article in relation to your pre-existing judgment of the film).

No notes or bibliography are required

The quality of student writing (grammar, usage, etc.) will affect the grade your assignment receives.

<https://stream-mcintyre-ca.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/westernu2020/title/21675>

3) The Girl Can't Help It (1956) Response Paper:

25% of final grade

4 double-spaced pages, in MS Word .docx format (no .pdfs) Due via OWL @noon March 10

As with the previous assignment, watch the film first and make notes about your viewing/listening experience—what you did or did not enjoy, which songs or artists you found compelling or awful, and try to write down why you felt that way. Then read "Manufacturing Authenticity," and spend approximately 1 double-spaced page discussing either how its argument affects your understanding/appreciation of the film as a whole, or explore in detail the chapter's argument in relation to a specific scene in the film. If you wish, you may make connections to contemporary phenomena that seem relevant or similar, but this is not required. Student writing (grammar, usage, etc.) quality will affect assignment grade.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soxN55f7fzU>

No notes or bibliography are required

4) Take-Home Final Exam:

35% of final grade.

This will cover **all** material presented during the semester: assigned listening, streaming, required reading, and material from class lectures. It will consist of short-answer questions related to specific course lectures, concepts, readings and topics, and an essay question that asks you to integrate material from multiple lectures in discussing a key concern of popular music studies (you will be given a choice of essay topics to choose from; your essay should be approximately 3 double-spaced pages). More detail will be provided in-class.

Outline of Lectures and Readings

- Jan. 13** **Introduction**
- Jan. 20** **Musical Tastes and Social Imaginaries**
Required Readings: David Riesman (1950) "Listening to Popular Music" (OWL) and Dan Brooks (2014) "Streaming Music Has Left Me Adrift" New York Times Magazine 17 October. (OWL) Also available online at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/19/magazine/streaming-music-has-left-me-adrift.html>
Suggested Reading: Howard Becker (1963) "The Culture of a Deviant Group"
Eric Weisbard (2014) "Introduction" Top 40 Democracy (UWO e-book)
- Jan. 27** **Tin Pan Alley**
Required Reading: Simon Frith (1987) "The Industrialization of Popular Music"
Suggested Reading: Bethany Bryson (1996) "Symbolic Exclusion and Musical Dislikes"
- Feb. 3** **No lecture/Streamed Film: Singin' in the Rain (1952)**
<https://stream-mcintyre-ca.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/westernu2020/title/21675>
- Feb. 10** **Music/Media/Modernity** **Singin' Response Paper Due by noon via OWL**
Required Reading: Carol Clover (1995) "Dancin' in the Rain" (OWL)
- Feb. 17** **The Brothers Isley**
Required Reading: Eric Weisbard (2014) "It's Whose Thing? The Isley Brothers and Rhythm and Blues" (chapter 1 of Top 40 Democracy)
- March 3** **No lecture/Streamed Film: The Girl Can't Help It (1956)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soxN55f7fzU>
- March 10** **Rock 'n' Roll and the Teen Market** **Girl Response Paper Due by noon via OWL**
Required Reading: Keir Keightley (2003) "Manufacturing Authenticity"
- March 17** **Listening Elsewhere**
Required Reading: TBA (check OWL "Announcements" for info)
Suggested Reading: Eric Weisbard Top 40 Democracy chapter 3 "Contemporary Adults"
- March 24** **Rock, part 1**
Required Reading: Keir Keightley (2001) "Reconsidering Rock," pp. 109-141
Suggested Reading: Weisbard chap. 5 "Wrath of the Buzzard" (UWO e-book)
- March 31** **Rock, part 2**
Required Reading: Norma Coates (2003) "Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women and Rock Culture in the 1960s and early 1970s"
Suggested Reading: Weisbard Top 40 chapter 4, "Madman Across the Water"
- April 7** **Dancing/Sampling/Flowing**
Required Reading: Mark Katz (2004) "Music in 1s and 0s: The Art and Politics of Digital Sampling"
Suggested Reading: Weisbard chap. 6 "This Generation's Radio" (UWO e-book)

The Final Take-Home Exam will cover all course material from January to April. It will be completed during UWO's Final Exam Period, with exact distribution/due dates TBA.

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Notes from the Dean's Office:

Rights and Responsibilities

The conditions governing a student's ability to pursue their undergraduate education at Western are ratified by Senate and can be found on the Academic Policies section of the University Secretariat: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/rights_responsibilities.html

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 Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments, including take-home exams, 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. All papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software Turnitin under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have 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:

- during exam periods,
- 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 or equivalent documentation, if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact the FIMS Undergraduate Student Services 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 of a student's home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see

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

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

In the event of a Covid-19 resurgence, it is possible that different procedures may need to be put in place on short notice.

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 Academic Calendar](#).

Grading at FIMS

- Normally, first year courses required for entry into an MIT or MPI module (MIT 1020E and MIT 1025F/G) are expected to have a course average between 68-72%.
- Normally, second year required courses (MIT 2000, 2100, 2200, 2500) are expected to have a course average between 70 and 75%.
- Normally, third year required courses (MIT 3000, 3100) are expected to have a course average between 72 and 77%.

Elective courses and 4th year seminars have no recommended course averages.

Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

Appendix A: Suggested Grade Ranges in MIT, MPI and MTP

Guidelines to the MIT Grade Range

These guidelines are benchmarks, and are not to be followed as rigid regulations. They will be adjusted as appropriate to take into account the level of the course and any specific instructions given by a professor. As well, competency in English language usage (including spelling and grammar) may be taken into account in the assignment of grades by individual instructors. Note that the 70-79 grade range is broken into two divisions, as this is the grade range into which a large number of students fall.

90-100 (Outstanding, A+)

The report shows sparkling originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic. Sophisticated synthesis and analysis of the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of the topic are demonstrated. Mastery of complex material and ideas is immediately evident. The topic is treated with sensitivity and subtlety of thought. The quality of the writing and background research is exemplary.

80-89 (Excellent, A)

The report shows originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic; it gets to the heart of the matter with comments and/or questions. It is clearly focused and logically organized. The quality of writing makes the report immediately understandable. Mastery of complex material and ideas is demonstrated. The report is of appropriate length, while preserving the priorities and emphasis of the material, so that the result is meaningful, not simplistic.

75-79 (Very Good, B+)

The report shows above average analysis, critical thinking and independent thought. Claims are supported by ample evidence and the components of the topic are well-researched and presented. The topic is addressed in reasonable depth and/or breadth and covers material appropriate to the course. The analysis is organized around focal points and the argument is easily followed. The report demonstrates an above average ability to write in an intelligible style and to condense material meaningfully and with a concern for priorities of that material.

70-74 (Good, B)

The report shows an attempt at analysis and critical thinking. Claims are supported by reasonable evidence. The topic is addressed in some depth and/or breadth, with references to the appropriate literature and course material. The analysis is organized around focal points. The report is generally well written and well argued.

60-69 (Competent, C)

The report demonstrates adequate comprehension of the topic. The report is on topic and is a reasonable summary of material covered in the course, but goes no further. Facts are stated accurately; the quality of writing is sufficiently intelligible with enough elaboration and enough connections made between ideas to permit a reader to understand the point of the report.

50-59 (Marginal, D)

The report shows less than adequate comprehension of the topic and of the material covered by the course. The report is a less than adequate summary of sources and/or is considerably off-topic. Facts are stated inaccurately or ambiguously; the writing style is difficult to follow; there is insufficient elaboration to permit reader's comprehension of relations among ideas; little judgment is shown in selecting detail for inclusion in the report.

Below 50 (Unacceptable, F)

The report demonstrates a failure to comprehend the topic. The material is disorganized and unintelligible. The report clearly does not meet the minimal requirements of the assignment.

