

Music 304 (XW)

A History of American Rock 'n' Roll

Prerequisites:

Music 101, 102, 221 or Consent of Instructor

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Course Description

To develop critical thinking and listening skills in popular music, specifically American Rock 'n' Roll from approximately 1945-early 1980s. We will endeavor to study this music from a number of different viewpoints and sub-genres. You will be expected to develop listening habits in this course to differentiate between the various song forms and instrumentation used in rock music.

Course Syllabus

For All Modules: Read: Chapter # — Chapters found in *From Bakersfield to Beal* . . .

For All Modules: Readings: — Articles found in *Regional Cultures in American* . . .

Module 1 (8/22–9/04) (Chapters 1 and 2)

Week 1 (8/22–8/28)

Watch the video *Rock the Early Days*

Read: **Chapter 1** (Rock 'n' Roll Basics)

(Readings: Smith, *The Electric Guitar*, *How We Got from Andres Segovia to Kurt Cobain*)

Lectures

Rock Instruments I

Rock Instruments II

Elements I: Melody, Lyrics, Harmony

250-300 Word Discussion Post: Discuss the “silencing of strong regional voices” as a result of “the day the music died” citing examples from *Rock the Early Days* Video. Was this a terrible coincidence, a perfect storm of events, or a conscious effort of major labels—“the ‘starmaker’ machinery behind the popular song”—to do so? Elaborate.

[Discussion Post Due: 8/25—Discussion Post Responses Due 8/28]

Week 2 (8/29–9/04)

Read **Chapter 2** (Rock ‘n’ Roll Basics)

(Readings: Miller, *Good Rockin’ Tonight*; Gillett, *The Sound Begins*)

Lectures

Elements II: *Timbre*

Elements III: Song Forms

Elements IV: Lyrics I

Elements V: Lyrics II

Listening Quiz: Listening Examples from Chapters 1 and 2 (9/01-9/03)

250-300 Word Blog Post. Drawing on James Miller’s article, *Good Rockin’ Tonight* and Charlie Gillette’s article *The Sound Begins*, discuss the changes in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the rise of independent labels marketing music by black artists, the expanding youth market and less strict censorship of lyrics as important reasons for the rise of rock ‘n’ roll. Comment on how these contributed to the change from popular music dominated by major labels marketing music primarily to adults to music marketed to a younger audience. How does economics factor into this change?

[Blog Post Due: 9/04]

Exam: Chapters 1 and 2 (9/02-0/04)

Module 2 (9/05–9/18) (Chapters 3 and 4)

Week 3 (9/05-9/11)

Read **Chapter 3**

(Readings: Barlow, *Music of the Dispossessed*, *The Rise of the Blues*)

Lectures

Early Blues, Robert Johnson

Early Blues, Urban, Chicago Blues

Beginnings of Rhythm and Blues

250-300 Word Discussion Post: Drawing from the anthology article by William Barlow, *Music of the Dispossessed*, *The Rise of the Blues*, discuss the movement of the blues from its rural beginnings to the “red light” districts in urban areas (especially New Orleans and Memphis) to similar districts in the urban north (Chicago). Consider also Barlow’s statement, “Even today, after having changed the landscape of American popular music, the blues remain a working-class-roots music constantly at odds with the commercially dominated pop mainstream.” Barlow’s article is 14 years old. Is his observation still true? Comment.

[Discussion Post Due: 9/08—Discussion Post Responses Due 9/11]

Listening Quiz: Musical Examples from Chapter 3 (9/08-9/10)

Week 4 (9/12-9/18)

Read **Chapter 4**

(Readings: Guralnick, *Sam Phillips Talking*)

Lectures

Sun Studios

Rockabilly I

Rockabilly II

250-300 Word Blog Post: Do Sam Phillips' own comments in the Sun Studio lecture video seem similar to the comments attributed to Sam Phillips in the article *Sam Phillips Talking?*, or did Peter Guralnick somehow portray a different Sam Phillips? Discuss and elaborate.

[**Blog Post Due:** 9/18]

Exam: Chapters 3 and 4 (9/16-9/18)

Module 3 (9/19–10/9) (Chapter 5, Interlude, Chapter 6)

Week 5 (9/19-9/25)

Read **Chapter 5**

(Readings: Zolo, *Gerry Goffin/Carol King Interviews: Songwriters on Songwriting*)

Lectures

Brill Building I

Brill Building II

Listening Quiz: Musical Examples from Chapter 5 (9/22-9/24)

Week 6 (9/26-10/02)

Read **Interlude**

Watch the video *The British Invasion the First Wave*

Lectures

Beatles Covers

250-300 Word Blog.

Discuss the following after watching *The British Invasion the First Wave*.

- Why was American rock 'n' roll so welcomed by British youth in the mid-1950s? Discuss how British adults responded to this new music. How does their response compare to American adults?

- Compare the Liverpool sound and the London sound of the early 1960s. Refer to differences in sound styles, influences, and specific bands.
- By 1963, why was British rock welcomed into America?
- Explain the musical changes and events that signaled the end of the first wave of rock 'n' roll and a new phase and meaning for popular music in both America and Britain.
[**Blog Post Due:** 10/02]

Week 7 (10/03-10/09)

Watch the video *John Lennon's Jukebox*

250-300 Word Discussion post:

Discuss the following after watching *John Lennon's Jukebox*.

- Sting says, "A record seemed like a magical artifact, you know, something that came from another planet – America." Explain what he means by this from a British and musician's perspective.
- Integration of musical forms, instruments, specific melodies and riffs, and personal backgrounds, is the main discussion throughout the film. Explain how integration played an important role in the influence the Beatles had on other bands. Use examples of specific songs or bands, if necessary.
- Elaborate on what you think John meant when he said, speaking of Bob Dylan, "He wasn't ever that political, really, but he never stood on the corner and shouted or anything. He did his job as a poet. It's poetry of the day."

[**Discussion Post Due:** 10/04—**Discussion Post Responses Due** 10/09]

Week 8 (10/10-10/16)

Read **Chapter 6**

(Readings: Sykes, *Motown*; Danielson, *Two Discourses on Blackness*, [especially 171-176])

Lectures

Ray Charles

Motown

Exam: Chapter 5, Interlude, Chapter 6 (10/14-10/16)

Module 4 (10/17–11/06) (Chapters 7, 8 and 9)

Week 9 (10/17-10/23)

Read **Chapter 7**

(Reading: Miller, *El Paso*)

Lectures

Nashville Sound

250- 300 Word Blog Post: Using Paul Zollo’s article, *Gerry Goffin/Carol King Interviews, Songwriters on Songwriting*, and Charles Sykes article, *Motown*, compare/contrast song-writing teams from the Brill Building with song writing teams from Motown.

[Blog Post Due: 10/23]

Week 10 (10/24-10/30)

Read **Chapter 8**

(Readings: Sounes, *Yesterday is Gone, But the Past Lives On*, Miller, *October 1975, Rock and Roll Future*; Gilmore, *Haight-Ashbury in the Summer of Loss*; Hoskyns, *Hotel California, New Kids in Town*)

Lectures

The Band

Social Protest-Psychedelic Rock

Listening Quiz: Music Examples, from Chapters 7 and 8 (10/27-10/29)

Week 11 (10/30-11/06)

Read **Chapter 9**

(Readings: Miller, *October 1975: Rock and Roll Future*)

Lectures

Springsteen, *Nebraska*

The Eagles

250-300 Word Discussion Post: Using James Miller’s, *October 1975, Rock and Roll Future*, and Barney Hoskyns’ article, *Hotel California, New Kids in Town*, compare/contrast East-Coast and West-Coast singer-songwriters.

[Discussion Post Due: 11/03—Discussion Post Responses Due: 11/06]

Exam: Chapters 7 and 8 and 9 (11/04-11/06)

Module 5 (11/07-11/20) (Chapters 10 and 11)

Week 12 (11/07-1/13)

Read **Chapter 10**

Lectures

Southern Rock

Horn Bands

250-300 Word Blog: Compare and contrast production techniques using horns from James Brown; Memphis (Memphis Horns); Detroit (Funk Brothers); and Jazz Rock (Chicago, Blood, Sweat & Tears, Tower of Power). Cite Examples.

[Blog Post Due: 11/13]

Week 13 (11/14-1/20)

Read Chapter 11

(Readings: Danielson, *Two Discourses on Blackness*; O'Hara, *Why Punk, Background Comparisons with Previous Art Movements, With Some Defining Characteristics of Punk*)

Lectures

Early Punk

Funk/Disco

250-300 Discussion Post: “Punk and Disco: Opposite Sides of the Same Coin?” is a statement attributed to rock historian and author Reebee Garafalo that implies a radical musical change by both urban and rural angry whites staring at “no future” for themselves, as well as by blacks who felt their music—R&B—was usurped and exploited by mainstream popular music. Do you agree? Disagree? Elaborate.

[Discussion Post Due: 11/17—Discussion Post Responses Due 11/20]

Exam: Chapters 10 and 11 (11/18-11/20)

November 21–November 25 — Thanksgiving Break

Module 6 (11/28–12/18) (Chapters 12 and 13)

Week 14 (11/28-12/04)

Read Chapter 12

(Readings: Warwick, *Rebellion and Girdom*; Garr, *Smile for the Camera*)

Lectures

Blondie-Talking Heads

Madonna

Listening Quiz: Musical Examples from Chapter 12 (12/02-12/04)

Week 15 (12/05-12/11)

Read Chapter 13

(Readings: Garr, Pillsbury)

Lectures

Texas Blues

MTV

250-300 Blog Post: Compare/Contrast Athens College Rock (B-52s, R.E.M) with Seattle College Rock/Grunge Scene (Mudhoney, Pearl Jam, Nirvana). **[Blog Post Due: 12/11]**

***Final Paper Due (12/10)**

Week 16 (12/12-12/18) (Finals Week)

250-300 Word Discussion Post: Compare the production techniques of 1980s Power Pop (Madonna, Huey Lewis, Prince, etc.) with those of 1960s and 1970s Pop (Lou Christie, The Archies, Neil Diamond, Elton John, etc.).

[Discussion Post Due: 12/14—Discussion Post Responses Due: 12/17]

Exam: Chapters 12 and 13 (12/16—12/18)

Final Paper

Write a concise, well-planned, approximately 750—1,000 word essay (double-spaced, 12- point Times or Arial font, spell-checked, correct grammar) submitted to the instructor (dstuart@iastate.edu) electronically in Blackboard that discusses the following question:

Over the years, certain songs have been widely considered by historians, producers, critics and musicians to be songs everyone should know. Choose one (1) song and discuss how and why you feel it deserves this acclaim, why it has been influential, ground-breaking, and/or exceptional.

Excellent essays will cover both the song’s musical qualities and its historical context and relevance to American culture and society. You will also be required to cite three (3) credible sources (e.g. journals, books, articles) that help back up your evidence and opinions. You may use the textbook and reader as one of your sources.

If you need help identifying a song, think about those listed in the textbook and reader. You can also browse *Rolling Stone*, *Billboard*, or other magazines and journals. But be sure to choose a song based on more than just expert opinion—every essay should have an argument that you develop yourself.

Here are some further questions you might think about:

- How was the songwriter able to relate and reach his/her audience? Think about the success of the song at the time it was written (relate to events of the time) as well as the song’s longevity. Has the song been covered? parodied?
- Is the instrumentation of the song different or new? experimental? If so, elaborate on what changes occurred and how they have influenced other artists.

Assume you are writing this paper for someone who is NOT necessarily a “fan” of this song. Explain and convince the reader why they should know this song.

If you need help with your paper at any time during the semester, please email dstuart@iastate.edu. Paper Grading criteria and sample essays are posted on Blackboard.

