

HIT RECORDS: LYRICS, STYLES, MIXING

Dr R. Toft

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of the techniques songwriters, performers, and producers in the 1960s (some later recordings will also be considered) employed to create verbal and musical arguments in a variety of genres, focusing on the structural elements of lyrics and music, performing styles, and arrangement (mixing).

CONTENT AND TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

This course, designed to help students hone their skills in aural analysis, investigates top-40 songs recorded mainly in the 1960s from the perspective of the critical listener. It introduces foundational terms and concepts and takes as its starting point the notion that training in popular music should include a component that enables students to acquire a technical understanding of the sonic material on recordings (the song itself, as well as its recorded version). Participants will gain entry to the soundscape of pop/rock through the ears of recordists (songwriters, arrangers, band members, producers, and engineers), and by the end of the semester, students should be able not only to identify and label with appropriate academic terminology many of the technical parameters of recorded sound but also to discuss the expressive flow of a track. Succeeding generations of recordists have been heavily influenced by the classic sounds developed by Fender and Gibson in the 1950s and 1960s and by the sonic creations of luminaries such as Phil Spector and George Martin. The techniques and concepts acquired in Music 2734 are transferable to other genres and artists.

One of the fundamental purposes of a university education is to challenge students to think differently about the subject at hand, and this course follows that guiding principle. In other words, if instructors do not make students feel intellectually uncomfortable, they have not been successful. So, please be receptive to new ideas, terminology (most of which will be quite foreign), and ways of thinking/working. This course applies critical thinking to the practices of recordists in order to increase sensitivity to the subtleties of a recording's sonic surface.

ORGANIZATION & OUTCOMES

Most of the lectures will be used to establish a technical foundation for listening and its related academic terminology, but the latter part of the course will be reserved for student presentations on the sonic characteristics of specific recordings from the 1960s. Through individual projects presented to the class, students will demonstrate their understanding of the inner workings of songs and recordings, so that the specific knowledge and listening skills acquired in the first part of the course can be used to evaluate and explain to others the strategies songwriters and recordists employ to create recordings.

COURSE MATERIALS

Textbook (on reserve in the Music Library):

Robert Toft, *Hits and Misses: Crafting Top 40 Singles, 1963-1971*. New York: Continuum, 2011

- available as an e-book: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/hits-and-misses-9781441116857/>
- some of the questions on the mid-term tests will be based on this textbook

ASSESSMENT

50% one mid-term test (early November during the 2-hour class)

50% Class presentation on a selected track from the 1960s (during the final 2 weeks of the term)

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Not everything covered in the lectures is included in the text for the course, and students will acquire much of the framework necessary for listening to and discussing recordings through material presented in class. Regular attendance is essential as part of the preparation for tests and the class presentation.

CONSULTATION

I am available for consultation outside class by appointment. Please contact me to arrange a time for a Zoom session. I prefer not to conduct course business by email, and I do not answer questions about course content by email. On the rare occasion that a student misses a lecture for legitimate and medically documented reasons, I will provide assistance with course material, but please be advised that I do not give private summaries of lectures. Students should rely on their peers to gather, and understand, material from classes they miss. See me only to clarify what you and your peers cannot grasp independently.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

Music 1651a/b

Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

GRADING SCALE

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

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION FOR STUDENT ABSENCE & MISSING WORK (≥10%)

Students are responsible for making up any missed classes or assignments as soon as possible. The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Illness may be acute (short term), or it may be chronic (long term), or chronic with acute episodes. Academic Consideration provides students with consistent, fair, and pedagogically appropriate consideration, without compromising the academic integrity of the course or program, when they have been unable to complete some component of a course due to short-term extenuating circumstances. Students who have long-term or chronic medical conditions (physical or mental) that may impede their ability to complete academic responsibilities are directed to seek Academic Accommodation through Accessible Education ([Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)).

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the end of the period of absence covered, to the Academic Counselling unit or Office of the Associate Dean, Undergraduate (TC210), of the student's Home Faculty together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the academic consideration being requested. Students are directed to read the Senate Policy on Academic Consideration for Medical Illness at the following website for further details regarding various requirements and procedures for the supporting documentation:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration.pdf

Whenever possible, students who require academic consideration should provide notification and documentation in advance of due dates, examinations, etc. Students must follow up with their professors and their Academic Counselling office in a timely manner.

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION FOR MISSING WORK (<10%)

In cases where students miss work that is worth less than 10% of the total course grade (ie. two or fewer assignments) due to medical illness or compassionate grounds, if documentation is voluntarily submitted to the Associate Dean's office and the Associate Dean grants an accommodation, then the missed assignment(s) or quiz(zes) will be discounted in the calculation of the final grade for the course. If documentation is not voluntarily submitted then the missed assignment(s) will receive a grade of zero. Students who have been denied accommodation by an instructor may appeal this decision to the Associate Dean's office but will be required to present appropriate documentation.

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 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 (other than statutory 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. The Diversity Calendar from the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion provides information on multifaith, multicultural and diversity related holidays and observances and links to resources for more information.

<https://www.edi.uwo.ca/resources/2816-2023-Diversity-Calendar-PDF.pdf>

CONTINGENCY PLAN

Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 restrictions may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered 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 assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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

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 or call 519 661-3568.

EXAMINATIONS & ATTENDANCE

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN EXAMS

Electronic devices of any type will not be permitted during Midterm Tests and/or Final Exam in this course (unless required for accessibility reasons based on an approved accommodation request from Accessible Education).

ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASSROOMS

The in-class use of electronic devices (other than for instructor-approved in-class uses) is expressly prohibited. Students found guilty of disrupting the class with electronic devices will be asked to leave the class and may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

PLAGIARISM DETECTION SOFTWARE USAGE

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software 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. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

COMPUTER-MARKED MULTIPLE-CHOICE TESTS OR EXAMS

These may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. Introduction

- textual criticism of songs and recordings
- tasks involved in making records
- the elements of a recording's sensory surface
- the four dimensions of a recording

II. The Song

1. Lyrics: Telling a Story (Text: Chapter 1)
 - the creation of a story and the technical devices used to enrich the telling of that story
 - song form as derived from lyric structure
2. Prosodic Tunes (Text: Chapter 2)
 - discussion of melodic line from the perspective of prosody and the natural delivery of words
 - differentiation of verse, chorus, and bridge
3. Harmonic Style: Guitar-Based Modalities (Text: Chapter 3)
 - harmonic style of pop/rock placed in a modal framework derived from guitar practices
 - harmonic rhythm

III. The Recorded Work

1. Intros and Outros
 - sonic signatures
2. Differentiation of Verse, Chorus, and Bridge
 - a sectional approach to sonic identity
 - loudness as a function of sonic differentiation
3. Performing Styles
 - a. Vocal (Text: Chapter 4)
 - the central focus of a recording is often the vocal track
 - the expressive style of singing in pop/rock
 - consideration of timbre, register, grammatical/rhetorical phrasing, vibrato, legato/staccato, portamento, messa di voce, accent & emphasis, and imperceptible appoggiaturas
 - b. Instrumental
 - guitar: timbral properties
 - pickups: single coil—Stratocaster, Telecaster
 - humbucker—Les Paul
 - amps: American tweed vs British stack
 - mics: type and placement
4. Signal Processing
 - reverberation, compression, double tracking, chorus, flanging, vocoder, gate, etc.

IV. Expressive flow (the creation and release of emotional/musical tension)

1. Invention and Arrangement (Text: Chapter 5)
 - assembling a musical discourse from disparate sources to create a hit
 - the activities of recordists from within the context of rhetorical criticism
 - case study: 'Laughing', The Guess Who (1969)
2. Transforming a Demo (Text: Chapter 6)
 - the art of turning an unpretentious demo into a powerful musical discourse
 - the distribution of ideas and instruments within the mix, as well as performance style and narrative flow
 - case study: 'Behind Blue Eyes', The Who (1971)
3. Hit and Miss (Text: Chapter 7)
 - the full potential of a song is realized only when the elements of a recording's sonic surface maximize the emotional impact of a song
 - the deficiencies of a miss and the strategies employed in a hit
 - case study: '(They Long to Be) Close to You', Bacharach (Richard Chamberlain—1963 & Dionne Warwick—1964) and the Carpenters (1970)

V. Notable Producers and Their Work

1. Phil Spector and the 'Wall of Sound'

- Spector's method of working
- Spector's influence: Brian Wilson, Bruce Springsteen, Jim Steinman

2. George Martin & The Beatles: from 'live' to 'studio' and back

- Martin's approach to recording in the early 1960s
- multi-tracking and increasing complexity in the recording process
- return to the 'live' ethos and Spector's involvement in *Let It Be*

VI. Student Presentations on Selected Tracks

- application of analytical techniques developed in the course to various top-40 tracks from the 1960s