



A Cultural History of U.S. Music in the 20th Century



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Small Title Here

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In this cultural account of twentieth-century American music you will find answers to these questions. You will encounter the **musical movements**, which determined the soundscape of twentieth-century United States. You will examine the **relationship between art, folk, and popular music** categories, and you will acquire a vocabulary and skillset to describe, compare, and **analyze this music**. To accomplish these learning goals, we will examine musical scores, among other primary sources, and bring them into a conversation with musicological literature.

By gaining a basic understanding of U.S. twentieth century history, you will be able to explain how musical styles reverberate in society, reflect cultural change, and make history. To practice analyzing music from this cultural lens, we will consider the relationship between music and identity, music and power. Two questions will drive our work together: **How do composers and musicians use sound to signify social identities? How do listeners hear race, gender, sexuality, and class in music?** We will explore musical institutions, the political economy of music, and musical technologies to discover who has the power to define, create, and hear music in twentieth-century America.

More broadly, you will learn to think like a thoughtful historian by developing the meta-cognitive skills necessary to deconstruct “accurate historical representations.” What biases and assumptions inform the construction of twentieth-century, American histories? By the end of this course, you will have rich answers for this question.

About the Instructor

Hi! My name is Stephanie Doktor. I graduated from the University of Virginia with a Ph.D. in Musicology. I also have a Masters in Musicology and Women’s Studies from the University of Georgia. My research focuses on race and modernism, and I have been teaching music courses to undergraduates at various institutions for over eight years. As you may have noticed from the course description, my favorite course objectives implore students to listen to the sounds of race, gender, and class in twentieth-century musics of the United States. I particularly enjoy watching students develop critical listening skills and historical perspectives of music. I have two boxer dogs, Copeland and Vera. (Don’t worry! You will see plenty of pictures of them during the semester, and you might even get to meet them!)

Learning Activities. In the following activities, you have the opportunity to demonstrate what you have learned about U.S. music of the twentieth century and to decide how you want to apply that knowledge. Detailed prompts including expectations, logistics, examples of best practices, and grading rubrics are posted on our course site.

Art Music Analysis (15%). Analyze a piece of art music by designing your own analytical method. Challenge yourself *not* to rely on strategies you have encountered in journal articles and in-class activities. Instead, come up with your own method, which helps the reader understand the cultural significance of the composer's musical choices. Devise interesting ways (media platforms, graphics, descriptions) to communicate how you think the composer uses style to signify race, gender, sexuality, and/or class.

Impresario Design (15%). As a scholar of 20th century American music, you have been asked to organize a program of works for the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center. Choose composers and works that have been omitted from history books and orchestral repertoires. Make a historically and culturally informed case as to why this music is valuable and should be performed. To do this, plan the event (selections, performance strategies, program notes) and determine how you will interest listeners in these neglected works. Use music analysis and pertinent historical information to convince potential audience members this music is culturally significant. This assignment is limitless, so push the boundaries of how the music that is up to one-hundred-years-old might be performed and witnessed today.

Pop Music Analysis (15%). For your second analysis project, analyze a pop or folk song by designing your own analytical method. Be mindful of how your analysis for popular songs differs from that of your classical music compositions. Like the first iteration of this assignment, challenge yourself *not* to rely on strategies you have encountered elsewhere. Put together a unique method, which helps the reader understand the cultural significance of the musician's creative choices. Your analysis should explain how the musician uses style to represent cultural identities.

A&R Pitch (15%). You work A&R for a record label. Make a case for why the CEO should sign your favorite new artist. Use information about the musician's life experiences and genre, audience and critical reception, and ticket and record sells to support your prediction about the potential popularity of this client. Include a portfolio of the musician's repertoire by using examples of your own music analysis, cover art, and photos from live performances, among other things, to present the information to your boss in an organized and compelling format. Part of your job is being aware of the cultural dynamics of the creation and consumption of this particular style so include analysis of this in your profile.

History Anthology (25%). With your course-long learning team, design a 20th century U.S. music anthology. Each member of the group should contribute separately to the anthology, but collectively, you should offer a representation of major musical movements. Write your chapter(s) on a selection of songs or compositions by two or three composers whose music represents a culturally and historically significant point in time. (Detailed prompt below.)

In-Class Focus (15%). This class comprises course-long learning teams. Your out-of-class preparation, presence, and creative focus for this in-class group work will enable you to accrue points for this portion of your grade.

Resources

(Coming soon: a list of resources to help students succeed in this course)

Course Schedule

Course Questions	Unit Objectives	Out-of-Class Preparation
What's so progressive about the Progressive Era?		
Who did Stravinsky <i>not</i> impact?		
Did the modern music industry make America a black music nation?		
What were the ultra-modernists rebelling against? Did the New Deal help or hurt these radical composers?		
What was the folk revival reviving?		
How did Swing become Bebop? How did Rhythm 'n' Blues become Rock?		
Does Elvis deserve the title "The King of Rock 'n' Roll"?		
What's so "post" about Post-modernism?		
If you get high, will you make psychedelic rock, too?		
Is electronic music still human?		
What's the difference between minimalism & post-rock?		
Is Madonna a feminist? Or just another privileged white woman?		
What happened to genre in the 1990s?		

Learning Cycles & Learning Teams

(Coming soon: Explanation regarding the ebb and flow of exploring course questions)

Final Note

These are my plans for this course, but I have bigger, longer-lasting dreams. I hope you take away more. I hope you gain insight into your own listening experiences and musical choices and that you learn to value those of others. I hope you begin to understand how your musical experiences and listening choices are culturally and historically situated and, as a result, determine your identity and interactions with others. And as you come to understand how music can both bolster and challenge social inequalities, I hope you begin to wonder how you have the power to affect social change in and through music. Finally, my hope is that, through this short-lived experience and through our brief interactions with one another, you develop a lifelong passion for learning more about music and how music can enrich your life.

Final Project: Constructing History, Creating an Anthology

Many art, music, and literary history texts come with an anthology—a compilation of works chosen by the editor. Choosing these works means omitting others, and often times these choices are riddled with complicated issues of power and privilege. What composers and works are considered valuable and representative? And to whom? At the same time, selections are also motivated by genuine desires to represent history as accurately as possible.

For your summative project in this course, you will work with your learning team to create an anthology: a collection of works, which you deem representative of U.S. music in the twentieth century. This text must be cohesive, in that it seamlessly covers the fundamental movements of the century without overlap between individual contributors. Each contributor should add two to three compositions/songs with an explanation of their cultural and musical significance at that particular moment in history. Work with teammates to create a coherent presentation of twentieth-century musical trends, whereby each member's contribution makes connections to the chapters preceding and following.

Contributions should include relevant biographical details of each composer, reference the historical and cultural backdrop of each work, and connect this information to original musical analysis. For example, a chapter on Marion Bauer might consider her Jewish and possible lesbian identity, her commitment to new music, her contribution to American musical identities at home and abroad, her negotiation of gendered roles and limitations in male-dominated circles, and the way in which her use of extended tonality in select compositions challenge normative conceptions of musical modernism. Such considerations move beyond tedious biographical information and descriptions of music disconnected from their cultural milieu.

Use existing anthologies as a point of departure not a model. Challenge yourself to be creative with this assignment, using course themes to deconstruct the assumptions and norms perpetuated in traditional canons of 20th century music. Presentation of the anthology could make use of different media (websites, blogs, radio shows, playlists).

Project Logistics & Resources (coming soon)

- Learning objectives
- Expectations and requirements
- Support / Scaffolding:
 - Dates for in-class prep time for group and individual out-of-class work
 - General research resources
- Past examples

Grading Rubric (coming soon)