

## SEFTMS: Media Studies

### MDIA 305: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF POPULAR MUSIC

**Trimester 2, 2008**

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**Course Prescription:**

The social history of popular music, from the emergence of rock'n'roll in the 1950s to the proliferation of musical genres in the 1990s. Particular reference will be paid to the intersection of popular music and cultural politics in North America and the United Kingdom (with some attention to New Zealand).

**Prerequisite:** 44 points from 200-level Media Studies (This may be waived if you have other relevant courses; e.g. music). Having passed MDIA 205 is useful, but not essential.

**Timetable:** Lecture Friday 2-4pm. **Location:** MURPHY 220

**Tutorials:** Tuesday between noon and 4pm. (TBA)

**Set text:** There is no set text for the course, nor are there Course Notes (despite what the information booklet said!). Instead, I will provide a number of handouts, and key references are on Closed Reserve in the Library.

**Course Workload:**

This course is worth 24 points. The expectation is that this equates to an average of eighteen hours work per week, over a twelve-week trimester.

This includes lectures, tutorials, course reading, and assignments.

Obviously, individual effort will vary, depending when you have pieces of work due.

**Assessment: internal** (details pp. 5-7).

Note that **students must complete all four pieces of required assessment (a tutorial task; two essays; and the in-class test).**

### **Learning Objectives**

On successful completion of the course, you will be able to:

- (1) Identify and critically discuss the nature and influence of key musical texts, genres, and their performers.
- (2) Demonstrate the relative importance of the music industry, technology, geographic, and social/cultural factors in the development of popular music.
- (3) Appreciate the ideological role of popular music in shaping age, class, ethnic and gender identities.

### **Course Outline**

Within a broadly chronological framework, the paper will critically examine topics such as:

- ◀ the construction of histories [the plural is deliberate] of popular music.
- ◀ the constitution, reconstitution, and influence of genres; e.g. blues, ‘alternative’; hip hop.
- ◀ the work and influence of key performers; e.g. Elvis Presley; The Beatles; Nirvana.
- ◀ shifts in the nature of the music industry; e.g. market cycles theory; globalisation; the role of independent labels; e.g. Rough Trade; Stiff; Flying Nun.
- ◀ generational politics; e.g. claims made for the significance of “rock” in the 60s counterculture; ‘alternative/hardcore’ in the 80s; ‘slackers’ and grunge in the 90s.
- ◀ cultural politics: popular music’s representation of issues of class, gender and sexuality; age, socialisation, and identity formation; the political appropriation of popular music for political causes/campaigns; e.g. the U.S. Civil Rights movement.
- ◀ the influence of changing technologies; e.g. the rise of MTV; the internet; MP3 etc.
- ◀ The relationship between popular music and style (visual, fashion, etc); e.g. the New Romantics.

**In other words, this is not simply a celebratory history, based around a succession of key texts and their creators, although both of these are important aspects of the course.**

No formal knowledge of music is required. The course presupposes an active student engagement with the history of popular music, in a manner that is both academically rigorous and pleasurable.

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## LECTURE TIMETABLE 2008

The lectures form the core of the course; attendance is advised.

During lecture sessions, I will use audio material along with screened episodes and extracts from several acclaimed televised music history series: "Dancing in the Street"; "Give it a Whirl"; "The Seven Ages of Rock"; and "Walk On By".

The first half of each class will be a 'lecture', with most of the a/v in the second part. Partly for this reason (copyright), only the basic course documents are on Blackboard.

**(1) July 11th**

### COURSE INTRODUCTION

**Administration: course outline; assessment; organising of tutorials**

### ISSUES IN POPULAR MUSIC HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

Selection and representation in the history of popular music:  
written histories, (auto-) biography, visual histories, and 'rock' museums.

#### **Further reading:**

Gilbert B. Rodman (1999) "Histories", in Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss, eds. *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, Malden. Mass; Oxford (UK): Blackwell, pp. 35-45.

LIBRARY CLOSED RESERVE

Thomas Swiss (2005) "That's Me in the Spotlight: rock autobiographies", *Popular Music*, 24,2: pp. 287-294. HANDOUT

Robert Strachan (2003) "Biography/autobiography", *CONTINUUM Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume 1: Media, Industry and Society*, London and New York: Continuum, pp.11-14. LIBRARY REFERENCE.

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### TUTORIALS START TUESDAY JULY 15<sup>th</sup>.

Tutorial lists will be posted on blackboard and the Media Studies noticeboard, Monday afternoon, July 14<sup>th</sup>.

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Lecture 2. JULY 18th

ROCK'N'ROLL: ANTECEDENTS; WHY 1955

Screening: Dancing, #1: Birth of Rock and Roll

FURTHER READING (FOR THIS AND REMAINING LECTURES):  
SEE COURSE READING LIST

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Lecture 3. July 25th

ROCK, REBELLION, AND REACTION: ELVIS PRESLEY

Screening: Dancing #2: Be My Baby (extract); Give It A Whirl (extract)

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ASSIGNMENT 1. DUE MONDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> JULY

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Lecture 4. August 1st

THE BEATLES AND THE SWINGING SIXTIES

Screening: Beatles documentary.

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Lecture 5. August 8th

SOUL AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

Screening: Dancing #4 RESPECT

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(Lecture 6) August 15<sup>th</sup>

IN CLASS TEST: Attendance is compulsory.

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STUDY BREAK 16 – 31 August

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ASSIGNMENT 2. DUE TUESDAY 2nd SEPTEMBER

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Lecture 7. September 5th

FROM THE DELTA TO THE ALBERT HALL (BLUES)

Screening: Dancing #5 Crossroads

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Lecture 8. September 12th

ALTERNATIVE' 1: GARAGE, PUNK, AND METAL

Screening: Dancing #7 Hang On to Yourself

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Lecture 9. September 19th

THE EIGHTIES: STYLE, IDENTITY AND GENDER POLITICS

(Disco; New Romantics; Glitter; Glam).

Screening: Dancing: # No Fun

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Lecture 10. September 26<sup>th</sup> (Brannavan Gnanalingham)

ALTERNATIVE' 2: GRUNGE AND INDIE

Screening: The Seven Ages of Rock. Episode 7.

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ASSIGNMENT 3: DUE MONDAY 29<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER

(11) Lecture 11. October 3rd

RAP & HIP HOP (Dr. April Henderson, Pacific Studies)

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Lecture 12. October 10th

AUTHENTICITY AND POPULAR MUSIC:

From the Monkees to the Spice Girls, ROCK STAR INXS s to Idols.

Course Quiz (with prizes!).

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## ASSESSMENT

### INTERNAL

**Mandatory Course Requirements: students must complete four pieces of assessment:**

Two assignments @ 30% each = 60%

A tutorial task = 20% (at least 7 tutorials must be attended).

An in-class multi-choice test = 20%

**Tutorial Task (20%):**

These will be randomly assigned at the first tutorial, and presented at the designated tutorial session. Most involve playing and commenting on the production, style, and impact/significance of a particular recording and its performer(s)/producers. Following this, within one week, you hand in a 2-3 page summary of your presentation (with refs.).

### **Assignments (30% each)**

Length 1,200 words, approximately.

Use the usual formatting conventions – check the Media Studies Guidelines to Essay Writing if uncertain.

You may use any referencing system, (e.g. Harvard, APA, MLA), as long as you are consistent.

**Do two out of the three options (if you do all three, I count the best two grades).**

#### **Assignment 1: Due Monday 28<sup>th</sup> July. (1,200 words approximately)**

Write a critical review of ONE popular music biography (or autobiography) from the list provided (see separate HANDOUT)

[Relates to course objective 1]

**Guidelines:** Your review should include:

- A concise (2-300 words) summary of the book.
- Clarification of the sources utilized by the author(s), and a critique of these.
- A summary of at least three reviews of the volume, and some comment on these.
- An assessment of the volume's contribution to popular music studies (i.e. placing it within the broader field).

The last should be the major focus of your assignment.

Further clarification, will be provided in class. Initial reading: Swiss, (2005) HANDOUT

#### **Assignment 2. Due Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September (1,200 words approximately)**

Critically discuss the nature and impact of **either** Motown **or** the San Francisco Sound on the music scene and society of the 1960s.

[Relates to course objectives 2 & 3]

### **Guidelines**

You need to distinguish between

(1) influences on musical styles (e.g. genre bending, fusion),

- (2) influences on the structure and operating fractions of the music industry (e.g. the scramble to sign S.F. bands following the Monterey Pop Festival black entrepreneurship in the case of Motown); and
- (3) broader social influences (attitudes; styles, especially fashion) and direct political influences (e.g. through particular music being used for raising consciousness,, commenting on cultural politics).
- Focus primarily on the United States.

**Assignment 3. Due Monday 29th September (1,200 words approximately)**

Critically discuss the work and influence of **one** popular musician (or group) on the music scene and society in the period (approx/during)1990 to 2008.

[Relates primarily to course objective 1]

**Guidelines:**

Avoid a simple celebratory approach.

Consult and refer to critical literature, including the music press.

Situate the performer(s) in relation to trends in the music industry and society (e.g. Nirvana-Grunge-Gen. X).

Include a selective discography.

**In Class Test:**

This will consist of multi choice or short answer questions, covering material (lectures; screenings; readings) from the first six weeks of the course.

**Extensions and Late Essays**

Extensions can only be granted by the course coordinator (Associate Prof. Shuker), and only in exceptional circumstances.

Late essays submitted without an extension will be given a maximum grade of C.

No essays will be accepted later than one week after the due date.

If you feel you may need an extension, speak to or email me BEFORE the due date, providing relevant certification (e.g. a doctor's certificate, a note from a counselor, etc.)

**The Final Date for submission of any written work in this course is Friday October 17, 2008.**

**Permission to submit work after that date must be sought in writing from the Course Convenor, and will only be granted in the most exceptional circumstances.**

## GENERAL UNIVERSITY STATUTES AND POLICIES

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the *Victoria University Calendar* available in hardcopy or under "about Victoria" on the Victoria homepage at:

[http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about\\_victoria/calendar\\_intro.html](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/calendar_intro.html)

Information on the following topics is available electronically under "Course Outline General Information" at:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/newspubs/universitypubs.aspx#general>

- Academic Grievances
- Student and Staff Conduct
- Meeting the Needs of Students with Impairments
- Student Support

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means *no cheating*. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. The University defines plagiarism as follows:

*The presentation of the work of another person or other persons as if it were one's own, whether intended or not. This includes published or unpublished work, material on the Internet and the work of other students or staff.* It is still plagiarism even if you re-structure the material or present it in your own style or words.

*Note: It is however, perfectly acceptable to include the work of others as long as that is acknowledged by appropriate referencing.* Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria and is not worth the risk. Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct and may be penalized severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning,
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course,
- suspension from the course or the University. Find out more about plagiarism, and how to avoid it, on the University's website:



