

Popular Music Analysis
Schulich School of Music, McGill University
[term and year: class meeting time and location]

Professor: Nicole Biamonte
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Course Description: this class introduces different theoretical and analytical approaches to the study of popular music. We will examine form, phrase structure, pitch syntax, rhythm and meter, texture, timbre, recording techniques, and other parameters, in order to understand how these elements are organized in popular music and how they combine to create expressivity and meaning.

Prerequisites: this course is open to graduate and advanced undergraduate students. Students should have completed Theory & Analysis 4 (chromatic harmony) and Musicianship 4 or the equivalent.

Coursework: consists of weekly readings, participation in class discussions, brief reading-response papers and analysis assignments, a complete transcription of at least 30 seconds of a song, and a final 10-12 pg. paper and 15-20 min. presentation based on this paper. The final project may be analytical, either an in-depth study of a song or a comparison of two versions of a song, or theoretical, demonstrating a paradigm or idea with multiple examples.

Course Materials: readings, recordings, scores and handouts will be on the MyCourses website.

Evaluation: course grades will be determined according to the following scheme:

Class participation	10%	Leading discussions	15%
Transcription project	15%	Written coursework	30%
Final presentation	10%	Final paper	20%

Attendance: I expect you to attend every class and to be on time. Unexcused absences or excessive lateness demonstrate that you have not made a commitment to this class, and will adversely affect your final grade. Acceptable excuses include documented illness, personal or family emergency, religious observances, or university-sanctioned activities. Late work will be accepted up to one week after the due date, without penalty if following an excused absence.

Language: in accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Academic Integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Cheating and plagiarism are serious academic misconduct, which disturbs the mutual respect between instructors and students, and poisons the atmosphere of a classroom. Those who commit academic fraud are robbed of the educational experiences that are the primary purpose of college study. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. See www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/students/ for more information.

Class Philosophy (adapted from David Brackett's syllabus): I do not have all the answers, I do not agree with the arguments made in all of the readings, I do not find all approaches to the subject equally valid, and nor should you. I have selected the readings for the issues that they raise, the ways that they intersect with other class readings, and to expose you to a range of approaches. Your critical reactions to the week's readings should form a major component of each class session, and no reading should be immune from your scrutiny!

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

week 1: introduction and overview

Richard Middleton, "Popular Music Analysis and Musicology: Bridging the Gap," *Popular Music* 12/2 (1993)

Allan F. Moore, introduction to *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Moore

John Covach, "We Won't Get Fooled Again: Rock Music & Music Analysis" in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, and Culture*, ed. Schwartz, Siegal, and Kassabian

week 2: transcription

Peter Winkler, "Writing Ghost Notes: the Politics and Poetics of Transcription" in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, and Culture*, ed. Schwartz, Siegal, and Kassabian

Anne Danielsen and Fernando Benadon, Conversation 3 in "Forum on Transcription," *twentieth-century music* 11/1 (2014)

Steve Rings, "A Foreign Sound to Your Ear: Bob Dylan Performs 'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding),' 1964–2009," *Music Theory Online* 19.4 (2013)

analysis: compare and contrast The Beatles, "With a Little Help from My Friends" and Joe Cocker, "With a Little Help from My Friends"; choose song for transcription project

week 3: form and phrase structure

John Covach, "Form in Rock Music: A Primer" in *Engaging Music*, ed. Stein

Trevor de Clercq, "Sections and Successions in Successful Rock Songs" (PhD diss., Eastman), end-of-chapter summaries

Mark Spicer, "(Ac)cumulative Forms in Pop-Rock Music," *twentieth-century music* 1/1 (2004)

Walter Everett, "Any Time at All: The Beatles' Free Phrase Rhythms" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Womack

analysis: diagram the forms of The Beatles, "Can't Buy Me Love" and Aerosmith, "Dream On"
diagram the phrase structures of Dolly Parton, "Jolene" and Outkast, "Hey Ya"

week 4: pitch structures

Walter Everett, "Making Sense of Rock's Tonal Systems," *MTO* 10.4 (2004)

David Temperley, "Scalar Shift in Popular Music," *MTO* 17.4 (2011)

Drew Nobile, "Unpacking the Melodic-Harmonic Divorce," *Music Theory Spectrum* 37 (2015)

Dai Griffiths, "Elevating Form and Elevating Modulation," *Popular Music* 34/1 (2015)

analysis: harmonic analyses of Prince, "Little Red Corvette"; Rush, "Freewill"; and Soundgarden, "Black Hole Sun"

transcription projects due

week 5: meter and rhythm

Nicole Biamonte, "Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music," *MTO* 20.2 (2014)

Mark Butler, "Hearing Kaleidoscopes: Embedded Grouping Dissonance in Electronic Dance Music," *twentieth-century music* 2/2 (2006)

Kyle Adams, "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music," *Music Theory Online* 15.5 (2009)

analysis: rhythmic and metric analyses of The Beatles, "Good Morning, Good Morning"; Led Zeppelin, "Kashmir"; and Radiohead, "Pyramid Song"

week 6: dance and embodiment

Lawrence Zbikowski, "Modelling the Groove: Conceptual Structure and Popular Music,"
Journal of the Royal Musical Association 129/2 (2004)

Anne Danielsen, "The Sound of Crossover: Micro-rhythm and Sonic Pleasure in Michael
Jackson's 'Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough,'" *Popular Music and Society* 35/2 (2012)

Hans Zeiner-Henriksen, "Moved by the Groove: Bass Drum Sounds and Body Movements in
Electronic Dance Music," in *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, ed. Danielsen
analysis: music/dance relationships in videos for Michael Jackson, "Thriller" and Feist, "1234"

week 7: semiotic analysis

Allan F. Moore, *Song Means*, ch. 8

Eric Clarke, ch. 2 on Jimi Hendrix's 'Star Spangled Banner' in *Ways of Listening*

David Brackett, "James Brown's 'Superbad' and the Double-voiced Utterance," *Popular Music*
11/3 (1992)

analysis: semiotic readings of The Beatles, "A Day in the Life" and Queen, "Bohemian Rhapsody"

topic proposals due

week 8: texture and timbre

Allan F. Moore, *Song Means*, ch. 2

Joseph Auner, "Sing it For Me: Posthuman Ventriloquism in Recent Popular Music," in *Journal*
of the Royal Music Association 128 (2003)

Ciro Scotto, "The Structural Role of Distortion in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal," *Music Theory*
Spectrum 38/1 (forthcoming 2016)

analysis: diagram textural and timbral changes in The Beach Boys, "Good Vibrations" and
Nirvana, "Smells Like Teen Spirit"

week 9: recording techniques

Nicholas Cook, "Methods for Analysing Recordings" in *Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*

Albin Zak, "Getting Sounds: The Art of Sound Engineering" in *Cambridge Companion to*
Recorded Music

Simon Zagorski-Thomas, "The Stadium in your Bedroom: Functional Staging, Authenticity and
the Audience-led Aesthetic in Record Production," *Popular Music* 29/2 (2010)

analysis: recorded space in Jimi Hendrix, "All Along the Watchtower" and Pink Floyd, "Money"

week 10: covers, versions, and mashups

George Plasketes, "Re-flections on the Cover Age: A Collage of Continuous Coverage in
Popular Music," *Popular Music and Society* 28/2 (2005)

Lori Burns, "'Joanie' Get Angry: k. d. lang's Feminist Revision" in *Understanding Rock*, ed.
Covach and Boone

Kyle Adams, "What Did Danger Mouse Do? The Grey Album and Musical Composition in
Configurable Culture," in *Music Theory Spectrum* 37/1 (2015)

analysis: stylistic comparison and interpretation of various versions of "Stairway to Heaven"

week 11: student presentations

week 12: student presentations

week 13: student presentations

last day of class: FINAL PAPERS DUE