

**MUSIC 044  
FALL 2005**

**INTERPRETING POPULAR MUSIC  
SECTION 001**

**12–1 MWF, Music Annex 210**

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**Office hours:** Tues 1:15–2:15

**Office:** Music 104  
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If you are unable to meet during office hours, other times can be arranged by appointment. Please try to contact me at least one day in advance of when you would like to meet.

### **Textbooks**

*Required:* Starr, Larry, and Christopher Waterman. *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Other readings will be distributed primarily through Blackboard.

### **WWW**

Blackboard course website: <http://courseweb.library.upenn.edu>

### **Listening**

Materials for listening assignments can be found in 3 locations:

1. On the CDs accompanying the Starr/Waterman text (for works discussed in detail in the text)
2. On the Blackboard website (for works discussed elsewhere). Hard copies of these recordings are also on reserve in the Ormandy Center of the Music Library (Van Pelt 4<sup>th</sup> Floor West).
3. On the following four box sets, which are on reserve in Ormandy:
  - *Roots of Rock 'n' Roll: 1946–1954*
  - *Golden Era of Rock 'n' Roll: 1954–1963*
  - *The Disco Box*
  - *No Thanks! The 70s Punk Rebellion*

Listening will form an essential component of the course. Assignments for each day will be included in weekly study guides. Identification and discussion of assigned works will form an important part of exams.

### **Course objectives**

- Ability to think critically about popular music as an essential phenomenon of twentieth- and twenty-first-century life
- Familiarity with some of the most commonly recurring issues in the interpretation of popular music
- Familiarity with a number of diverse styles of popular music
- Ability to recognize and discuss representative works in musical, historical, and cultural terms
- Ability to identify the significant features of individual works and to interpret them in relation to broader trends
- Increased awareness of research on popular music

**Course content and approximate organization**

Historical and stylistic areas of focus:

Tin Pan Alley, the birth of rock 'n'  
roll, disco, punk, Detroit techno,  
5-Percenter rap

Interpretive and musical areas of focus:

Voice, authenticity, intertextuality  
Form, rhythm, texture

*Unit 1 (Weeks 1–5):*

Course introduction  
Tin Pan Alley  
The birth of rock 'n' roll  
Voice

*Unit 2 (Weeks 6–10):*

Disco  
Punk  
Authenticity  
Intertextuality

*Unit 3 (Weeks 11–14):*

Detroit techno  
5-Percenter rap  
Course conclusion

**Grading**

Midterm Exams (2 at 20% each)	40%
Final Exam	30%
Writing Portfolio	30%

*Grading scale:*

90-100%=A-, A, A+	60-69%=D, D+
80-89%=B-, B, B+	below 60%=F
70-79%=C-, C, C+	

For each range, plus (+) grades will be the top 3% and minus (-) will be the bottom 3%. Thus 87% is the lowest possible B+; 83% is the lowest possible B; and so on. The grade of A+ will be reserved for students with averages of 97 or higher whose performance is deemed truly exceptional.

**Important dates (check your schedule *now!*)**Midterm Exam 1: **M, 10/10**Midterm Exam 2: **M, 11/14**Final Exam: **Wednesday, December 14, 12–2 p.m.****Strategies for success**

- Attend all classes and participate actively.
- Complete assigned reading and listening prior to class.
- Instead of cramming for tests and leaving assignments until the night before, spend time on this class on a regular basis. On average, you should expect to spend about 2–3 hours outside of class for each hour spent in class.
- *Listen* to assigned repertoire frequently and thoughtfully. Listen before and after the class in which it will be discussed. Listen actively; ask yourself questions about the piece and take notes.

### Student Info Sheet

Name:

Prefer to be called:

E-mail:

Major(s):

Minor(s):

Year (freshman, sophomore, etc.):

Hometown:

Do you play any instruments or sing? If so, please indicate which ones (e.g., electric guitar, violin, turntables, etc.), the styles in which you perform, and your approximate skill level. Also mention any ensembles of which you have been a regular part (bands, choirs, a capella groups, etc.). [*No prior musical experience is needed for this course; I am just interested in knowing as much about the background of our class as possible.*]

Do you read any systems of musical notation (Western staff notation, guitar tablature, etc.)? If so, indicate which ones and your level of fluency.

Please list any other Penn music classes that you have taken or are taking by title/number. Also list any courses you've taken outside of the music department that dealt with popular music.

Who are your favorite musicians? Which styles of music do you listen to most often?

Why did you sign up for this course? What are you hoping to gain from it?

## SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

### Music 44: Defined entry 4

For this entry I have selected two songs, each of which is rich in intertextual associations. Specifically, each song references other texts through some of the following techniques:

- Sampling of a phrase from a previous recording
- Lyrical references to a previous recording
- Lyrical references to literary and/or mythological “texts”

There are secondary associations as well: for instance, in one or more cases the song *referenced* is actually a cover of an earlier song.

You will research these associations in groups. You should be able to discover the associations using internet resources such as Google, allmusic.com, and bulletin boards on the musicians’ web sites. In addition, I have placed all of the specific recordings invoked by these songs on reserve in the library. Meet once to discuss your ideas and then write an entry on your own. We’ll discuss the songs in class on Wednesday, 10/26. This will count as a double entry.

Song 1: Rufus Wainwright, “Memphis Skyline.” From *Want Two*, 2004.

As a starting point, listen to the song, then do a web search to find the lyrics. What does the song seem to be about? What allusions to literature or mythology are evident? Besides your general impressions discovered through isolated lyric analysis, there is also a more specific component: the “him” in this song refers to a real person (a musician), and the lyrics (and possibly the music) refer to specific aspects of his life and creative output. Trace these associations as far as you can. In addition to “Memphis Skyline,” there are recordings of two other relevant songs in the library.

Group 1: Allison A, Mike, Bilge, Ben W

Group 2: Kara, Natasha, Darris, Dave P

Song 2: Messiah, “Temple of Dreams (Short Mix).” Released as dance single in 1992.

This song samples a phrase from another song. The phrase is “Did I dream you dreamed about me?” Use that phrase to find out which song the sample comes from, and spend some time listening to that song and reading its lyrics. What is it about, and how does its style compare to “Temple of Dreams”? Furthermore, which intertextual associations does it itself invoke? Trace these associations as far as you can. In addition to “Temple of Dreams,” there are recordings of two other relevant songs in the library.

Group 3: Anne, Brian, David B, Rachel

Group 4: Allison F, Todd, Sean, Alexandra

Your written entry should be about 3 pages in length. Besides identifying the particular associations, write about the way in which those associations create meaning (in the song I gave you to start with and in the other songs). Your entry may reflect facts & ideas from group discussion, but should be your own writing. Good entries will offer your own thoughts and not simply summarize what other group members said.

Bonus question: There is actually a connection *between* song 1 and song 2 in addition to the associations within each. What is that connection?