

**MEDIA AND MUSIC**  
**COMMRC 1732 – SPRING 2004**  
**M 6:00-8:30pm, 218 CL**

Professor: Jonathan Sterne  
Email: jsterne@pitt.edu (please allow 24 hours for a response, longer on weekends)  
Office: 1130 CL  
Mailbox: 1117 CL (Department of Communication)  
Phone: 624-6797 (I check messages once daily MW)  
Office Hours: M 2:15-3:15, W 11-12, and by appointment

Availability: Office hours are set aside for you – feel free to stop by office hours without an appointment. The rest of my time is set aside for meetings, class prep, writing, etc. If you wish to see me outside my regular office hours, please make an appointment. Office hours may occasionally be cancelled or rescheduled; I will announce that in class and/or on the website and on my door.

"I service society by rocking."  
– Jack Black

### **PREREQUISITES**

To take this class, you must have earned a passing grade in Mass Communication Process (CommRC0320) and satisfied the lower-level writing requirement. No prior coursework in music is required, though it would help if you are interested in music. A course in Public Speaking will help, too.

### **RATIONALE AND GOALS**

Music is everywhere in modern life, yet Americans rarely encounter “live” music. Both mass and personal media now shape our musical lives in many ways. Cars have radios, commercial establishments have Muzak, TV shows and movies have soundtracks, and personal music media are available on our computers, in our homes, and as we walk. Despite this ubiquity, people often say they “don’t know anything about music.” After this course, you will know many things about music and media. We will discuss cultural, industrial, technological and other dimensions of music as it is mediated in our lives.

Here are my goals for this class (not necessarily in the order of their importance). Over the course of the semester, I want you to:

1. Develop your reading and critical thinking skills
2. Practice and improve upon your writing skills
3. Learn to explain and analyze how music industries and technologies work and why they matter.
4. Learn to explain and apply a basic set of analytical concepts, and use them to analyze music, culture, and communication.

### **WHAT YOU’LL DO IN THIS CLASS**

There are three important skills in this course: writing, reading, and discussion. They are all skills at which you can improve, and you should treat them like you’re learning a craft. I am always happy to discuss them with you: I want you to leave this course a better writer, reader, and discussant.

## Writing:

You probably wouldn't want to listen to a musician or band that never practices or never listens to other people's music. The same goes for writing. To become better writers, people need to 1) read extensively; 2) read carefully; 3) write a lot; 4) discuss their writing and ideas; and 5) revise a lot. Since this course fulfills a "W" requirement, it will provide many opportunities for you to do all five things. Let me repeat that for emphasis: expect to write often and in some quantity. The minimum quantity requirement for a "W" course is 24 pages per student over the course of a semester. You will write significantly more than that.

There are three types of writing for the course: informal writing, formal writing and instrumental writing. We will discuss them throughout the semester, but here are general definitions:

1. **Informal Writing** is aimed at helping the writer to think. Informal writing assignments are occasions for reflection, brainstorming, and exploration. In your informal writing, I want you to take lots of chances and concentrate on getting ideas down on paper. Informal writing will be ungraded or graded "lightly" (on a "plus, check, minus" scale). My responses will engage you at the level of ideas. These assignments are designed to help you generate ideas for class discussion or your more formal writing assignments.

2. **Formal Writing** is aimed at helping the reader to think. Formal writing demonstrates your mastery of the material and is consciously designed to persuade readers of a particular point of view. In the process of persuasion, you may also need to educate the reader, but the ultimate goal is to advance a cogent and powerful argument.

I will read your formal writing very carefully and assign it a letter grade (though it's recorded as a number). For these assignments, you can expect extensive comments on the mechanics and content of your paper. Formal writing adheres to strict stylistic guidelines: spelling and grammar count; I expect careful, thorough, thoughtful, and developed argumentation; the paper should be designed to accomplish a specific task; it should use external sources to support arguments; and it should use a known citation system.

3. **Instrumental Writing** lies somewhere between formal and informal writing. It serves a limited and specific purpose. Its purpose will determine how it looks. This syllabus is an example of instrumental writing, as are the quizzes you will take each week. Instrumental writings – mostly quizzes for this course – will be graded on the basis of how well they accomplish the task at hand.

## Reading:

Reading is every bit as much a skill as writing. This course will emphasize careful and generous reading, so that you can then make full use of your reading when you write.

In order to read well, you should do the following:

1. Do the reading when it's assigned. Readings are assigned at particular times for particular reasons.
2. Set aside a significant amount of time each week *just* for reading. Reading requires concentration and reflection; it should not be combined with other activities, like socializing or watching TV.
3. Make sure you are physically comfortable.

4. Writing should accompany reading. Mark important passages and passages that raise questions in your mind. Some people prefer to take notes on readings in a reading journal; others prefer to directly mark up the text.
5. You should keep a dictionary close at hand and look up words you do not understand.
6. Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the reading, you should be able to provide thoughtful answers to questions like: Why is the topic important? What was the author trying to accomplish with this piece? What are the main points he or she wants to get across? Why did the author choose these particular examples or topics?
7. Learn the conventions of your genre. Academic writing is the genre you will most often encounter in this course, and academic writers have very specific habits.

### **Discussion:**

Discussion also requires a set of skills. The Department of Communication offers an entire course on discussion, but here are some basic skills and techniques to keep in mind:

1. **Active listening:** Listen for the specific words speakers use. Do you know what they mean? Do they suggest a particular standpoint? Ask if you don't know.
2. **Questioning:** If you are not absolutely sure what a speaker means, or if you don't understand something a speaker says, ask for clarification.
3. **Pushing Others:** Encourage colleagues to clarify or elaborate on what they mean to say. Push them to generalize and make interpretations. Speculate!
4. **Embellishment:** Build upon what others have said. Do you agree? Then add something. Do you agree partially? Then point out some differences. Do you disagree, or are you unsure? Present another perspective on the topic we're discussing.
5. **Dissemination:** Direct your comments to more than one person: discussions are for the whole class. Address the whole class; make eye contact.
6. **Engagement:** Good discussions are lively and freewheeling. Do not be afraid of speaking up. If you have a question, odds are that other students will have the same question. Basic questions and comments are encouraged. They are often the most important contributions to the discussion.

### **Ground Rules for Class Discussion:**

1. Follow the golden rule. Treat others as you'd like to be treated.
2. Wait your turn – do not interrupt others.
3. You do not have to express your own opinion on a subject. You are also free to change your mind on any topic at any time.
4. Disagreements are natural and welcome in scholarly discussion. So are arguments. But arguments are not contests. You should grant the same courtesy and respect to the people with whom you disagree that you would want for yourself.
5. Students bring lots of interesting experiences to the classroom, and you are encouraged to bring up your experience when it is relevant to class discussion (and when you feel comfortable doing so). Everyone's personal experience deserves respect. But if you bring up your own experience in class, it becomes a public topic for discussion. Others may interpret your experience differently than you do, and they are free to respectfully disagree with your interpretation.

6. Musical tastes differ widely. Expect that your classmates may look for different things in music than you, and that they may hear the same material very differently than you.

## **SEMESTER GRADE BREAKDOWN**

Detailed handouts will accompany major assignments. Also be sure to check out the **very serious attendance policy on p. 6.**

**Participation [10%]:** In order to earn a passing grade, you must attend class regularly, complete all in-class assignments in good faith, be prepared and attentive, have something relevant to ask or tell, and be courteous toward your classmates and your prof. There is also an online forum for discussions related to class (see related handout). The same rules apply, and participation online is an acceptable alternative to speaking in class (within limits) if you prefer that mode. Adequate participation means an 7/10. If your participation is *below* average, then you'll receive a lower grade than 7. To earn a B or A level grade in this category, you will need to go above and beyond the minimal requirements listed here. Note that missed classes also reduce your participation grade.

**Instrumental Writing: Weekly Quizzes and Annotations [20%]:** This part of the course is designed to reward you for doing the readings and asking questions if you don't understand something in class. If you *understand* the material and effectively *demonstrate* that understanding, you should ace these quizzes. Your lowest score in this category will be dropped. Weekly quizzes will be on the readings assigned for that week and discussions from the previous week. Quiz questions are graded on the following scale: 100% (got it right); 80% (clearly did the reading but got it slightly wrong); 50% (was completely wrong or vague); 25% (wrote an answer, shows no evidence of having done the reading); 0% (didn't write an answer). I may occasionally assign an in-between score. Most quizzes will have two questions.

Annotations are short essays that explain a passage from a reading. Please see the separate handout for annotations. They will be graded in the same manner as quizzes.

**Informal Writing: Online Journals and Responses [20%]:** During the course of the semester, you will post three online journals and six responses to other students' journals (see assignment for details). Journals are graded on the following scale: 100% (outstanding); 90% (fulfills requirements of the assignment); 50-75% (does follow assignment or other major problem); 25% (wrote something, not clear on its relationship to the course). Journals must be posted online in the class discussion forum in order to count toward your final grade.

**In-Class Music Presentation [5%]:** You will bring a piece of music to class and use it to raise issues related to the course or your semester project. This assignment is explained in a separate handout. Presentations will be graded on a similar scale to journals.

**Semester Project [45%]:** For the semester project, you will create an analytical paper, a creative essay, or some other kind of written text (of at least 12 pages). Multimedia projects with a substantial written component will also be considered. More details will be forthcoming during the semester. Projects that adequately fulfill the requirements of the assignment will receive a "C" grade (70-79); papers that excel in one or two areas will be given a "B" grade (80-89); papers that are outstanding in three or more areas will be given an "A" grade (90-100). You are strongly encouraged to meet with me to discuss your project as it develops.

Final grades will be based on the standard university scale:

90-100% = A range  
80-89% = B range  
70-79% = C range

60-69% = D range  
0-59% = F

The professor reserves the right to put semester grades on a curve if he deems it prudent or necessary (it was neither prudent nor necessary in Spring 2002). He also reserves the right to adjust students' semester grades based on his evaluation of their overall performance.

## **MATERIALS AND FACILITIES**

**Texts:** The required texts are:

Keith Negus (1999). *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. New York: Routledge. (\$26.95 new/\$20.25 used at the Pitt bookstore – new only; you might find a used one online somewhere).

Rob Drew (2001). *Karaoke Nights: An Ethnographic Rhapsody*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield. (\$24.95 new/\$18.75 used at the Pitt bookstore. You might find a used one online somewhere).

A course packet is available from the Pitt bookstore for \$70 + tax. Course packets from previous semesters of Media & Music contain MOST of the assigned readings but not all of them. See me if you want to use an old coursepack and we'll work something out to get you the new readings.

If purchase of these books presents a financial hardship, please see me.

**Course Website:** A course website has been set up at:

**<http://www.pitt.edu/~jsterne/mm/index.html>**

It includes this syllabus, and will grow over the course of the semester to include all assignments, and other materials relevant to the course.

### **Additional University Resources:**

The University has some additional resources to help you out. These are not remedial programs, and often the best and most advanced students use them.

The Writing Center offers individual consultation on all aspects of writing. Appointments are recommended. They can be found at: 501 CL, 412-624-6506 [<http://www.pitt.edu/~englweb/resources/writcent.html>].

The Learning Skills Center offers a range of services to help you become a more effective student such as courses in speed-reading, study skills, time management, and test taking. They can be found at: 311 WPU, 412-648-7920, [<http://www.lsc.pitt.edu/>].

The Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS) provides a broad range of support and services to assist students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. They can be found at 216 WPU, 412-648-7890 (voice or TDD), [<http://www.pitt.edu/~osaweb/drs/drs.html>].

The Counseling Center provides personal, academic, and career counseling to undergraduate and graduate students. They can be found at 334 WPU, 412-648-7930, [<http://www.pitt.edu/~counsel/>].

## **OTHER COURSE POLICIES**

### **1. Compliance**

By staying enrolled in this class, you acknowledge that you understand – and agree to abide by – the following rules and regulations *and* the University’s policies (see addresses for Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity below). Failure to follow the letter *and the spirit* of these reasonable guidelines can result in a reduction of your final grade, failure of the course, and/or other penalties as set by University policy.

### **2. The Very Serious Attendance Policy**

Signing up for this class indicates that you are committed to being here between 6 and 8:30pm *every* Monday this semester. **For the purposes of this policy, there is no such thing as “late” or an “early departure”; you are either present for an entire class meeting or not.**

**You are allowed two absences over the course of the semester (equivalent to missing two full weeks of class).** I think you will agree that this is a lot. **For any absence above two, your grade will be reduced by 1/2 grade. If you have more than four absences, you will automatically fail the course.**

**In-class assignments and quizzes cannot be made up and annotations are not accepted late. If you miss class, you are still responsible for whatever was covered that day.**

Absences in excess of two will be excused only under exceptional and unavoidable circumstances. Requests for excused absences must be submitted in writing, with documentation, and immediately upon a student’s return to class. **Students who enroll late or who skip the first week are not exempt from this policy.**

### **3. Classroom and Lyrics/Speech Codes**

You are expected to know and follow the rules for discussion listed on pp. 3-4. Your cell phones and other noisy devices should be turned off and stowed. Since popular music often uses language not often found in university classrooms, we will spend some time on the first day deciding whether we want any codes in place about lyrical content for the music people bring to class. All students will be expected to comply with the class’ guidelines.

### **4. Wakefulness**

6-8:30pm is a late and a long time. You should modulate your food and caffeine intake so that you will be awake and attentive during class time. Food and beverages are welcome in my classroom, but please clean up after yourself.

### **5. Assignments and Extensions**

Assignments (except for quizzes, in-class work, and the like) will be announced well in advance of due dates. If you know in advance that you can’t make a due date for a paper, please discuss it with me beforehand. Requests for extensions after a due date has passed will only be granted in exceptional and unavoidable circumstances and must include (a) one typed, double-spaced page explaining the reason for

missing the deadline, and (b) relevant documentation such as an official doctor's note. The written request for an extension must be in my hands within one week after the scheduled due date. Your professor is under no obligation to accept late assignments.

## 6. **Grades**

I am eager to help you do well on assignments before they are due. Please visit me during office hours or make an appointment to ask me questions as you are working on an assignment or review material.

Grades are final. I grade assignments and quizzes on performance, not effort. Effort will be recognized in your participation grade for the course. Here are the circumstances under which I would change a grade: (a) if I have made an error, or (b) if I have failed to hold you to the same standard as everyone else. In the event that you feel they received an undeserved grade, you should make your case in writing to me within two weeks of receiving the grade. Under no circumstance will I award a grade of "incomplete" for the course.

I do not give out grades over email or the telephone.

## 7. **Accommodations:**

If you require special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, please notify both the professor and Disability Resources and Services by the end of the first week of the term. Disability Resources and Services is located in 216 William Pitt Union (648-7890 [voice or TDD]), and their website is at: [<http://www.pitt.edu/~osaweb/drs/drs.html>].

## 8. **Nondiscrimination Statement**

As a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, I value equality of opportunity, human dignity, and racial/ethnic/cultural diversity. Be assured that I will promote a safe and conducive environment for learning. In accordance with University policy, I do not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam era (though we'll discuss our community standards for lyrical content on the first day of class). In addition to the University's policy, and within the bounds of the course, I do not discriminate on the basis of political creed. This means that you do not have to agree with me or the readings in order to do well in this course. So long as you demonstrate an understanding of the course material, you are under no obligation to agree with it. I also make every effort to avoid discrimination on the basis of class or income. If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable, please let me know.

## 9. **Other Policies You Should Know**

Student Code of Conduct: [<http://www.pitt.edu/~osaweb/usjs/code.html>]

Academic Integrity: [<http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/ai1.html>]

Plagiarism is using someone else's ideas as your own in academic or published writing. If you use someone else's ideas, you are expected to cite them. If you use someone else's exact words, even if it is part of a sentence, you should put quotation marks around them and cite them. If you have any questions about plagiarism or how to properly cite your sources, please see me. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and can result in failure of the assignment, failure of the course, and other serious sanctions up to and including expulsion from the University. Plagiarism also really pisses me off.

## **UNOFFICIAL SCHEDULE**

This printed schedule is offered for your convenience and is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and listed on the official website schedule.

### **I. Mediated Music as Communication and Culture**

5 January 2004

#### **Intro to the Course: What is Music?**

Read the syllabus, introductory lecture, basic listening terms, class discussion about norms and values

12 January

#### **Music is a Cultural Practice**

Christopher Small (1998). "Prelude: Music and Musicking." *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, pp. 1-18

Tia Denora (2000). "Music as a Device of Social Ordering." *Music and Everyday Life*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 109-150.

After this class, you should be able to explain what it means to study music "as a text" and "as a social practice." Explain why it is important to combine both approaches.

19 January

**No class** – happy MLK day!

26 January

#### **Authenticity and the Politics of Culture**

Theodore Graczyk (1996). "Rock Authenticity and Liberalism." *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 218-226.

Ted Friedman (1993) "Milli Vanilli and the Scapegoating of the Inauthentic." *Bad Subjects: Political Education for Everyday Life* #9. Available online at <http://eserver.org/bs/09/Friedman.html>.

Greg Dimitriadis (2001). "From Hip Hop to Rap: From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative." *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy and Lived Practice*. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 15-34.

After this class, you should be able to define "authenticity" and explain how it changes across contexts.

29 January

**Concept Journals due online at 11:59pm.**

2 February

### **Music in Audiovisual Media**

Andrew Goodwin (1992). "A Musicology of the Image." *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Video, Television, and Postmodernism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 49-71.

Anahid Kassabian (2001). "How Music Works in Film." *Hearing Film*. New York: Routledge, pp. 37-60.

Rob Harvilla (2003). "Radiohead Rorschach." *East Bay Express* (17 September). Available online at: <http://www.eastbayexpress.com/issues/2003-09-17/music.html/1/index.html>.

After this class, you should be able to explain the different roles of music in audiovisual media.

5 February

**Responses to Concept Journals due online by 11:59pm.**

## **II. Industry and Culture**

9 February

### **Corporations**

Chapters from Keith Negus (1999). *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. New York: Routledge:

Chapter 2 "Corporate Strategy: Applying Order and Enforcing Accountability" and  
Chapter 3 "Record Company Cultures and the Jargon of Corporate Identity."

The following chapters are divided among groups. The starred group will present the chapter to the class, and the other group will be come with questions about the chapter.

Group 1:	Chapter 4 "The Business of Rap"
Group 2:	Chapter 5 "The Corporation, Country Culture, and the Communities of Musical Production"
Group 3:	Chapter 6 "The Latin Music Industry, the Production of Salsa, and the Cultural Matrix"
Group 4:	Chapter 7 "Territorial Marketing: International Repertoire and World Music"

After this class, you should be able to define "corporate culture" and why it is important for understanding the music industry. Explain the different strategies major labels use to minimize their risks and maximize their profits.

16 February

**Alternatives to Major Labels**

Stephen Lee (1995). "Re-Examining the Concept of the 'Independent' Record Company: The Case of *Wax Trax!* Records" *Popular Music* 14:1, pp. 13-31.

Lord Finesse, Mr. Dave, Wendy Day, and LS One (2002). "How Not to Get Jerked!: The Hip Hop Elementary Roundtable." *Rhythm and Business: The Political Economy of Black Music*, ed. Norman Kelley. New York: Akashic Books, pp. 235-254.

Wendy Day and Norman Kelley (2002). "Wendy Day: Advocate for Rappers (Interview by Norman Kelley)." *Rhythm and Business: The Political Economy of Black Music*, ed. Norman Kelley. New York: Akashic Books, pp. 254-266

After this class, you should be able to explain how the "independent" sectors of the music industry are similar to and different from major labels.

**A copy of the object you intend to analyze is due at the beginning of class.**

17 February

**Object Analysis Journals due online at 11:59pm.**

23 February

**Amateur Hour**

Rob Drew, *Karaoke Nights: An Ethnographic Rhapsody*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield

After this class, you should be able to describe the role of amateurism in our mass mediated musical culture and economy.

24 February

**Responses to Object Analysis Journals due online at 11:59pm.**

1 March

**Workshop:** Bring a draft of your midterm to class.

3 March

**Midterm Portfolios due in my mailbox, 1117CL by 3pm. Must be posted online by 11:59pm.**

8 March

**Spring Break 2004!**

### III. Technologies

15 March

#### **Distribution**

Peter Manuel (1993). "The Impact of Cassettes on the International Recording Industry." *Cassette Culture: Music and Technology in North India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 21-35.

Steve Jones (2003). "Music That Moves: Popular Music, Distribution and Network Technologies" *Cultural Studies* 16(2): 213-232.

After this class, you should be able to explain some of the central issues around music distribution.

18 March

**Responses to midterms due online at 11:59pm.**

22 March

#### **Studios: Mechanics and Industry of Recording (and Studio Field Trip)**

Brian Eno (1983). "The Recording Studio as a Compositional Tool, Part I." *Downbeat*, pp. 56-7 (July).

Albin Zak (2001). "Places and Tools," in *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 97-127.

After this class, you should be able to describe the parts of a recording studio and how they work. Discuss how these technologies enable different kinds of musicking to take place than in a live performance.

29 March

#### **Instruments and Media**

Steve Waksman (1999). "Introduction: Going Electric," and "Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meanings of Blackness." *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 1-13 and 167-206.

Mavis Bayton (1997). "Women and the Electric Guitar." *Sexing the Groove*, ed. Sheila Whitely. New York: Routledge, pp. 37-49.

After this class, you should be able to explain how musical instruments come to take on distinct cultural meanings, using the example of the electric guitar.

1 April

**Progress Journals due online at 11:59pm.**

5 April

**Media as Instruments (and Guest DJ)**

Tricia Rose (1994). "Give me a (Break) Beat! Sampling and Repetition in Rap Production." *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, pp. 73-84.

Sarah Thornton (1996). "Authenticities from Record Hops to Raves." *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, pp. 26-86.

After this class, you should be able to explain how musicians have come to use media like audio recording to expand the creative process.

8 April

**Responses to Progress Journals due online at 11:59pm.**

12 April

**Technology and Taste**

Theodor Adorno (1945/1993). "A Social Critique of Radio Music." *Radiotext(e)*, ed. Neil Strauss. New York: Semiotext(e), pp. 272-279.

Marc Perlmann (2003). "Consuming Audio: An Introduction to Tweak Theory." *Music and Technoculture*, eds. Rene T.A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay, Jr. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, pp. 346-357.

19 April:

**Final Project due in my mailbox by noon, 1117 Cathedral of Learning. Must be posted online by 11:59pm Monday night.**