

Metropolitan State University of Denver
Introduction to Music

Professor: Michael W. Harris

Course Time and Room: MW, 12:15-2:45, King Center 215

Course Description: Examines the development of music, primarily in Western Culture, and how it relates to the music of today. Students will learn how to listen, evaluate, and write about music in a historical and critical context.

Course Goals: Understand and be able to place into context music using correct terminology and facts. Also grasp the overall history and trends in the development of music. Be able to think critically about music and use correct terminology in its assessment.

Texts:

No required text, though I will recommend sources for your research in class.

I will post a link to a Spotify Playlist on Blackboard that I will keep updated with required listenings.

Grading:

Two Short Papers (50 points each): 100 points

Four In-Class Quizzes (25 points each): 100 points

Final Exam: 100 points

Total: 300 points

Attendance Policy: Success in the course will rely heavily on regular attendance as there are no exams. As such, I do expect regular attendance and I will pass around an attendance sheet in every class. There is no separate attendance grade, however after **THREE** unexcused absences I will start deducting one point from your final grade for each absence. Reasons for excused absences include: medical reasons (with a doctor's note), family emergencies (death of family member, etc.), or school related activities (with a note from a University official). This does not include sorority/fraternity events, death of pets, or any appointments, jobs, etc. that you had the ability to schedule at a different time.

Schedule (Subject to change at a moment's notice):

Unit I: Music...In All its Forms

June 9: *How to Listen and Talk About Music*

June 11: *Music in Culture and Identity: The Voyager Record*

Unit II: Folk and Traditional Music

June 16: *Folk Music in the United States (Quiz 1)*

June 18: *Music of Japan (Essay 1)*

June 23: *Music of India*

June 25: *Music of the Middle East and North Africa*

Unit III: Art Music in the Western Tradition

June 30: *Baroque and Classical Music (Quiz 2)*

July 2: *The Romantic Period*

July 7: *The Early 20th Century*

July 9: *Since World War II*

Unit IV: Popular Music

July 14: *The Founders of Rock and Roll (Quiz 3)*

July 16: *The Beatles*

July 21: *Motown and R&B in the '60s and '70s*

July 23: *Punk and Glam Rock in the '70s*

July 28: *Postmodernism and Remix Culture (Quiz 4 & Essay 2)*

July 31: Final Exam

Assignments:

Quizzes: These will be given in class on the dates shown above. These quizzes are worth 25 points each and will contain the following: five listening examples from the songs listened to since the previous quiz (a list will be sent out in advance of the quiz), and also a brief essay question relating concepts discussed in class. The exception is the first quiz which will be over the concepts discussed in the first two class periods. **See schedule for dates.**

Short Papers: These are 3 ½ page minimum papers, double spaced, on the given prompt. I will be posting the prompts on Blackboard. **See schedule for due dates.**

Final Exam: Your final will be primarily a listening exam in which I will play 35 musical examples taken from throughout class. This will be followed by a brief multiple choice, short answer, and essay portion. The exam is worth 100 points.

EXTRA CREDIT:

You can do one extra credit concert report for up to 15 points. This report should be like a critical review you might read in a newspaper or on-line. It should be at least 2 ½ pages and should discuss the following points: what you liked and disliked about the concert and band, the venue and audience, and discuss at least one song/work in-depth. The concert can be of any genre: rock/pop, jazz, classical, folk, etc.

A Brief Note on Writing and Research:

I am asking all students to conform to the Chicago/Turabian style manual or MLA in their papers and citations. You can find copies of these style guides, which governs how to format footnotes and bibliographies, along with other things, in the library or on-line. If you have any trouble with using the guide, please e-mail me or come see me during office hours. If you do not use this style guide, you will lose points on your papers.

I am also asking you to be careful in editing and writing your papers. When writing your short papers, feel free to develop a more casual/conversational style like you might find in journalistic or blog writing. Though, make sure to still edit and remain professional. My hope is that you learn to be versatile in your writing which is a useful skill to develop. I will discuss some good models and examples ahead of assigning the first short paper.

When researching for your papers, you may utilize a site like Wikipedia to do preliminary research and find other sources (a well written article will include a list of citations, a bibliography, along with external links), however, treat Wikipedia like any other Dictionary or Encyclopedia. Consult it, help it to direct your research, but it is neither a source one cites (it is considered “Common Knowledge”), nor the final word on a subject. It is a beginning, and sometimes, like any other source, it can sometimes be wrong or contradictory.

You will need to develop a keen sense for bad information with researching any subject, especially when consulting with on-line sources, though any source should be put through this scrutiny. Ask yourself three questions: does the author cite sources, are these sources credible (i.e. published by legitimate publishing houses or websites), and does the writing have multiple editorial mistakes (errors in grammar, spelling, etc.)? If the answer to any one of these questions is “Yes,” then you might want to reconsider the information the source provides. Also, beware of any source (internet, print, or otherwise), that makes broad statements that seem to contradict established facts. With these tools, you will be well on your way to doing credible research.

Lastly, know the difference between “opinion” and “fact.” Facts are things that you can back up with sources that are not susceptible to emotions and bias (of course, so much of history is always being reevaluated and rewritten because of long standing biases, but this is mostly due to interpretation of facts, but for now we’ll ignore that prickly issue). Opinions, however, are something we deal with much more in music and other arts. We pass judgments on the quality of works of arts, if we like it or not, find it pleasing or not, etc. But a key part of this class is learning how to evaluate music free of the bias of opinion. Even if you don’t like a particular piece, it is important to understand it, its impact on our culture, and how the piece came to be. Your opinion is a separate, though still important, thing. It is always better to be able to cite specific things you don’t like about a piece than to simply say “it’s bad.” This class will teach you to be able to say “it’s bad because...” which is the beginning of a deeper knowledge and appreciation.