Music 126/Ethnic Studies 178

The Blues: An Oral Tradition

Fall 2017 Course Page/Syllabus

Instructor  Asher Tobin Chodos

Lecture  Tuesday and Thursday 6:30p-7:50p in Center Hall, room 216

Office Hours  Thursdays 4:00pm - 6:00pm at the Art of Espresso

Teaching Assistants  hold office hours by appointment

- Leah Bowden  -- (Ahmed-Jarret)
- Kyle Motl  -- (Jung-Nygard)
- Eliot Patros  -- (Oulad-Zou)

Final Exam  Tuesday, 12/12/2017, 7:00p-9:59p, location TBA

Course Overview

Objectives

This course traces the history of the blues from their beginnings to the present. We will approach the subject in two ways:

1. As a musical form. Here students will learn to appreciate and analyze the evolution of the diverse musical techniques that fall under the broad generic banner of "blues." Students will also enrich their understanding of American popular music in general by learning to hear the ways in which it derives from blues.

2. As a cultural product that can be uniquely instructive for the study of
American history and culture. After learning to hear the spectrum of stylistic nuance in the blues, students will learn to interpret its significance. In this way students will not only deepen their knowledge of the narrative history of the United States, but will do so from the perspective that only aesthetic analysis can offer. The idea that music discloses basic truths about its social environment is a fundamental principle of musicology; in addition to offering students a course in American history through the lens of one of its most important cultural products, this course introduces students to the practice of musicology.

Summary

The blues has meant many different things over the course of the 20th century. As an extension of African musical practices within the American slave population and the black communities of the Jim Crow south, the blues puts us in touch with the resilience of African American cultural expression in the face of extreme cruelty and repression. We will trace the changes wrought upon this music by the urbanization of America's black population, and its re-signification as an emblem of far left politics across the racial divide after the depression. We will study its decisive importance for the advent of Rock-n-Roll in the 1950s and the radical counter-cultural movements of the 1960s, as well as its influence on popular musical forms all over the world, continuing to the present day. This is a course that will help students to understand how blues music works, but it is also a chance for students to consider its means in the context of the history of race, class, and gender in the United States.

Course Requirements

Preparation

Each lecture has a reading and listening assignment. These should be
completed before the lecture in question.

**Reading assignments** are either linked to on this page or available through course reserves. There will frequently be optional readings; these are intended as further reading for anyone who is interested, and they can be useful resources for the final paper. **Listening assignments** are linked to on this page.

**Note that in many cases a UCSD IP address (or the VPN) will be required to access course materials.**

**Exams**

Written exams will be held on **Nov. 7** (midterm) and **Dec. 12** (final). Both exams are cumulative, including for listening material. Makeup exams will not be offered.

Exams will not be multiple choice; instead, they will combine short answer and long-form essay writing. **Each exam will begin with a listening identification section.** I will maintain a comprehensive listening list, distilled from listening assignments and selections played in lecture, from which (exclusively) listening identifications on the exams will be drawn. This list will be updated at the end of each week.

**Pop quizzes** will be given at the beginning of lecture several times throughout the quarter. These cannot be made up.

Don't put off the listening assignments; cramming for listening IDs is usually ineffective.

**Attendance**

**Attendance is required at all lectures.** The lectures will follow the readings, but **not everything you'll be responsible for knowing is**
covered in the reading or lectures alone. Lecture slides will be posted each day after class, and they will contain material, including additional listenings not necessarily assigned as homework, that will appear on exams.

Required work/grade breakdown

- Pop quizzes (5%)
- Writing assignment 1 (due Oct 17 at the beginning of lecture in hard copy) (guidelines) -- 10%
- Writing assignment 2 (due Nov. 21 at the beginning of lecture in hard copy) (guidelines) -- 15%
- Final paper (due Dec. 7 at midnight, submitted via TritonEd) (guidelines) -- 20%
- Midterm exam on Nov. 7 - 20% -- please bring a bluebook
- Final exam on Dec 12 -- 30% -- please bring a bluebook
  - comprehensive listening list for exams

Writing assignment submission
The smaller writing assignments are due in hard copy in lecture. The final paper can be submitted via TritonEd by midnight on Nov. 7.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty can result in an “F” for the course and can lead to further disciplinary action by the University. (For more information see the section entitled “UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship” in the UCSD General Catalogue.)

Course Schedule -- subject to change; check back regularly
Week 0

0.1 -- Sept 28 -- Course Introduction / Defining the Blues (I)

No preparation due before first lecture
lecture draws heavily from Jonhson, Walter, Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market, Harvard Univ. Press, 2001

Week 1
1.1 -- Oct 3 -- Defining the Blues (II): Blues and Racial Consciousness

Reading

required:

2. Baldwin, James, "The Uses of the Blues," in The Cross of Redemption (course reserves)

optional:

1. Dixon, Willie and Don Snowden, "Introduction", from I am the Blues: The Willie Dixon Story
   - “The Negro as Non-American: Some Background” and “The Negro as Property”
   - “Slave and Post Slave"
3. Barbara Fields, "Race and Ideology"

Listening

- Willie Dixon, I can't quit you, Baby
- Bessie Smith, Back-water Blues (1927)
- Bessie Smith, Gin House Blues (1926)
- Hart Wand, Dallas Blues(pub 1912)
- Nat Ayer, "Oh, You Beautiful Doll" (1911)
• WC Handy, St. Louis Blues (pub 1914)

1.2 -- Oct 5 -- African Music and the Blues

Reading


Listening

1. Nalanke Pular, N'Dewe Dewe Yo (Follow, follow! -- (the griot))

2. Nalanke Pular, Senegambie

3. Selections of Sansa and Chorus performances from Western Congo

4. Banjo maker Jim Hartel discusses the origins of the modern banjo

5. Lomax recording of African American fife music

6. Ali Farka Toure, The River (first track only)

7. Ali Farka Toure against John Lee Hooker video

Week 2

2.1 -- Oct 10 -- Minstrelsy

Reading

1. Lott, “Blackface and Blackness,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*

2. Lhamon, “Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*
3. Frederick Douglass, "The Hutchinson Family.—Hunkerism." in *The North Star*, Oct 1848

**Listening**

1. Bert Williams, Nobody (1905)
2. Bert Williams, Unlucky Blues
3. Emmet Miller, Lovesick Blues
4. Emmet Miller, Anytime
5. Merle Haggard on Emmet Miller
6. Hank Williams, Lovesick Blues
7. Jimmy Rodgers and Louis Armstrong, Blue Yodel No. 9
8. Jimmy Rodgers, TB Blues
9. Vanilla Ice, Ice Ice Baby

**2.2 -- Oct 12 -- Blues Queens and Vaudeville**

**Reading**

2. Davis, Angela. “Blame it on the Blues: Bessie Smith, Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, and the Politics of Blues Protest.” *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*

**Listening**

1. Mamie Smith, Crazy Blues (1920)
2. Bessie Smith, Downhearted Blues (1923)
3. Ma Rainey, See See Rider Blues (1924)
4. Bessie Smith, Take me for a Buggy Ride
5. Ma Rainey, Blame it on the Blues
6. Ma Rainey, Sweet Rough Man
7. Ma Rainey, Shave 'em Dry
8. Ma Rainey, Misery Blues (1927)
9. Ma Rainey, Soon This Morning (1927)
10. Ma Rainey, Prove it on Me Blues
11. Bessie Smith, Young Woman's Blues
12. Bessie Smith, Hateful Blues (1924)
13. Bessie Smith, Yes Indeed he Do
14. Ida Cox, Wild Women Don't Have the Blues (1925)
15. Ida Goodson, Tell me Baby Blues
16. Ethel Waters, Lucille Hegamin, Alberta Hunter, Edith Wilson, Ida Cox,
   Sippie Wallace, Ma Rainey, Clara Smith
17. Charles Anderson

Week 3

3.1 -- Oct 17 -- Rural Blues and Recording I

Writing assignment #1 due at the beginning of lecture

Reading


Listening

1. Charley Patton, Down the Dirt Road Blues (1929)
2. Willie Brown, Future Blues
3. Son House, Preachin' the Blues (1930)
4. Son House, Preachin the Blues (1965)
5. Son House, John the Revelator (1965)
6. Mississipi Sheiks (Lonnie and Bo Chatmon), I am the Devil
7. Bo Chatmon (Bo Carter), Banana in Your Fruit Basket
8. Bo Chatmon (Bo Carter), Please Warm my Weiner
9. Tommy Johnson, Big Road Blues
10. Tommy Johnson, Canned Heat Blues
11. Booker T. Washington White (Bukka White), Parchman Farm Blues
12. Blind Willie McTell, Statesboro Blues (1928)
13. Nehemiah Skip James, Little Cow and and Calf is Gonna Die Blues
14. Skip James, Devil Got My Woman

3.2 -- Oct 19 -- Rural Blues and Recording II

Reading


Listening

1. Blind Lemon Jefferson, Matchbox Blues (1927)
2. Blind Lemon Jefferson, Black Snake Moan (1927)
3. Blind Lemon Jefferson, See that My Grave is Kept Clean
4. Ed Bell, Mean Conductor Blues
5. Sonny Scott, Red Cross Blues
6. Leroy Carr, How long, how long blues
7. Jaybird Coleman, No More Good Water (Cuz the Pond is Dry)
8. Alger 'Texas' Alexander, Justice Blues
9. Blind Willie Johnson, Dark was the Night, Cold was the Ground (1928?)
10. Blind Blake, Police Dog Blues
11. Beale Street Sheiks, Mr. Crump Don't Like It
12. Lizzie Douglas (Memphis Minnie), Bumble Bee
13. Memphis Jug Band, Cocaine Habit Blues
14. Gus Cannon Jug Stompers, Can You Blame the Colored Man

Week 4

4.1 -- Oct 24 -- Blues and Country Music

Reading


Listening

4.2 -- Oct 26 -- Robert Johnson

Reading


Listening

1. Influences:
   - Son House, Willie Brown, Skip James, Hambone Willie Newbern
2. Cross Road Blues
3. Preachin Blues
4. If I had Possession Over Judgment Day
5. Hellhound on my Trail
6. I believe I'll dust my broom
7. Drunken Hearted Man
8. Come on in my kitchen
9. Love in Vain

Week 5

5.1 -- Oct 31 -- Leadbelly and the Lomaxes

Reading


Listening

1. Black Girl (Leadbelly cf. Kobain version)

5.2 -- Nov 2 -- Blues and Jazz

Readings


Listening

Week 6

6.1 -- Nov. 7 -- Midterm Exam

6.2 -- Nov. 9 -- Urban Blues

Reading

Listening

Week 7

7.1 -- Nov. 14 -- Blues and Rock

Reading


7.2 -- Nov. 16 -- Folk Blues Revival

Reading


Listening

1. Junior Kimbrough
2. RL Burnside

Week 8

8.1 -- Nov. 21 -- British Blues

Writing assignment #2 due at the beginning of lecture
Reading


8.2 -- Nov. 23 is Thanksgiving -- no class

Week 9

9.1 -- Nov. 28 -- Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin

Reading


9.2 -- Nov. 30 -- Blues and Rap

Reading


Week 10

10.1 -- Dec. 5 -- The Blues Today I

Readings


10.2 -- Dec. 7 -- The Blues Today II / Exam Review

No preparation for today; final paper due at the beginning of lecture