MUSIC IN THE CITY

Why is music so central to the life of the city? Throughout the ages, throughout the world, music seems to have a special power to fill urban space with meaning. This is mostly why the music industry is always desperately trying to chase the new ways music is produced and consumed. Much about the rapid changes in the industry can be linked to changes taking place in the geography of cities and globalization. Through music people feel connected to landscapes, neighborhoods, buildings, and identities. Music gives value to places, so helps cement us/them divisions, a process easily seen (heard) in national anthems.

This course tries to understand how the interplay exactly occurs between sounds, places, and difference in the United States through case studies from many genres. Themes will include the transnational circuits of reggae, the class backgrounds of punk, Motown and civil rights, psychedelic countercultures, underground electronic music, and the ambivalent identities of Minneapolis’s very own Prince. The course makes use of a large range of media and learning styles. Through listening exercises, class discussions, field trips, and an individual research project, students are strongly encouraged to explore their own musical interests.

3 cr, meets Lib Ed req Diversity and Social Justice in the US
Wed 5.00-7.30, Blegen 140
Dr Arun Saldanha
saldanha@umn.edu
1 Course objectives

The course aims to develop a critical-geographical understanding of popular music in the contemporary United States, by understanding music as a spatiotemporal process:

- music reaches certain cities and areas rather than others, and this happens according to both capitalist and countercultural logics
- music gives landscapes divided by social difference certain affective qualities, through invoking them in sound, lyrics, and visual support
- within cities, music gives meaning to venues for various cultural groups by affecting human bodies directly during listening.

The course meets the requirements for the Liberal Education theme Diversity and Social Justice in the United States. We will see how every urban musical event is shaped by the differences of class, race, and gender, sometimes subtly, sometimes flagrantly. Why this remarkable fact – that all music is tainted by injustice – is usually forgotten is one of the central questions this course will address. Don’t worry, the course will end on a decidedly positive note. After all, music has the unique power to enable the imagination of a more just society.

2 Liberal Education

Liberal Education in general “Regardless of specific theme, Liberal Education Theme courses foster your critical reflection on important, contemporary challenges facing our society and/or the world, challenges that call for your response and participation. These courses especially focus your attention on developing a sense of responsibility for engaging with issues of contemporary relevance, as well as on the realization of the stakes involved. Communities sustain themselves in so far as they meet effectively the challenges that face them. The Liberal Education Theme courses emphasize that critical reflection on, and engagement with, these matters requires that they be understood from different perspectives. Important issues are typically controversial ones. Effective critical reflection requires also building a knowledge base regarding critical issues facing society and understanding the process of trial and error involved in deploying that knowledge. A hoped for result is that a Theme course will enhance your own sense of creative involvement and independent thinking.”

Theme courses in general “With their emphasis on compelling contemporary issues, the Themes offer opportunities for students to consider timely and engaging questions in all of their complexity; to reflect on ethical implications; to discuss and to debate; to formulate opinions; to have their opinions respectfully challenged and to respectfully challenge the opinions of others; and to connect what they are learning to their own lives and to the world around them. Courses in these areas offer students a sustained opportunity to
engage in difficult debates around moral, legal, and ethical issues that require critical inquiry from a variety of perspectives and the cultivation of independent thinking. All LE Theme courses have the common goal of cultivating in students a member of habits of mind:

- **“thinking ethically about important challenges facing our society and world”**
  Geog 3377 shows a phenomenon as ubiquitous and emotionally charged as music is always entwined with issues of justice, inequality and exclusion

- **“reflecting on the shared sense of responsibility required to build and maintain community”**
  Geog 3377 analyzes the deeper structural and historical forces working through cities and ‘communities’, which shape responsibilities in the present

- **“connecting knowledge and practice”**
  Geog 3377 constantly puts concepts to use through in-class audio and video, fieldwork, writing, and presentation: music will never sound the same again!

- **“fostering a stronger sense of our roles as historical agents”**
  Geog 3377 sees the US musical landscape as reflecting a world-history of colonization, slavery, capitalism, urban planning, and emancipatory politics, understood as contingent and open-ended at every turn

**CLE Guidelines on Diversity and Social Justice** “To satisfy the Diversity and Social Justice in the United States Theme requirement, a course must meet these criteria:
- The course explores one or more forms of diversity through the multi-layered operation of social power, prestige, and privilege
- The course advances students’ understanding of how social difference in the U.S. has shaped social, political, economic, and cross-cultural relationships
- Students examine the complex relationship between a particular form of diversity in the United States and its impact on historical and contemporary social dynamics, democratic practices, and institutional stratification
- The course enhances students’ understanding of diversity as a social construct that has promoted the differential treatment of particular social groups and served as the basis for response to subsequent social inequities by these groups
- The course engages scholarship that has emerged in response to epistemological gaps in information and perspective in traditional disciplines.”

**About this course** Geog 3377 meets the CLE theme Diversity and Social Justice in at least the following ways:

- by understanding that diversity and social injustice are discernible in cultural output, students understand the many layers of inequality and privilege in society, since the study of music enables examining social difference at levels from the economic and the technological to the bodily and the spiritual
- in many of the case studies, emphasis is on the contingent historical construction of particular musical cultures, which in the context of the US and its neighbors, which are particularly strongly determined by slavery, waves of European, Asian, Latin American, and more recent African immigration, and displacement of indigenous people, all of which are variously “hearable” in music (country, jazz, salsa, bluegrass, New Age...)
- the social and ethnic diversity of the US is studied in its shaping the institutionalization (radio, clubs, magazines, audiences) of the music industry, especially along black/white lines
- the course shows through case studies that musical tastes and the distribution of music need not be along gendered, class, and racial lines, but explain the deeper lying socio-economic structures responsible for shaping those tastes
- the postcolonial, feminist, and sociological critique of musicology’s own epistemological gaps and biases in its dominant understanding of music separate from social injustice is dealt with explicitly in a number of the case studies.
- overall the critical, democratic, multicultural, and/or cosmopolitan tendencies of various styles of music are given their due, whether they are explicitly protesting social injustice (new folk, gangsta rap) or not, with the critical ethical question “Can music bring diverse people together?” guiding the entire course.

3 Workload

Every week we address a certain case study in the geography of music. In the weekend we read chapters from the course book with some additional articles or excerpts. Every student posts a brief response (200 words) on Moodle by Tuesday midnight. 2-3 student take turns summarizing the chapter and moderating the discussion at the beginning of class. Then Arun continues the general discussion, and selects and develops the themes for the lecture. Handouts are supplied in class and count towards the participation grade, as do in-class response papers.

There will be a couple of required field trips in the Twin Cities, for which you write a 2-page report answering circulated questions. The center of the course is an individual empirical research project on a musical-geographical phenomenon of their own choosing. This research project happens in stages with 3-4 deadlines. The research results are written into a 10-page paper and presented to the rest of the class at the end of the semester. The project has to incorporate concepts discussed in the readings and classes and it refers to the academic literature. There are two open-book examinations with questions designed to evaluate the comprehension of the course’s approaches and themes, each consisting of 5 essay questions relating to a new case.

4 Attendance

Since this course meets only once a week and is much focused on class exercises (listening to music, watching music videos and other video material, filling in handouts, discussions about controversial issues, explanation of philosophical concepts in cultural theory and ethics, personal anecdotes), attendance and
attentiveness is absolutely crucial. Arun will notice and penalize whenever you are absent, arrive late, use your phone, or fall asleep. Personal electronic devices are not allowed. If you cannot make it to class let him know why beforehand, or with emergencies, immediately after.

5 Course book

Apart from short additional readings there is only one course book. It has to be bought immediately through an online vendor (hard copy only) so as not to fall behind in the Moodle posts, group presentation and class discussion. You will be penalized if you don’t have it by the third class. Bring it to class every week.


6 Reading responses and moderation

There are assigned chapter readings every week are discussed during the first 20 to 30 minutes of each class. First, by midnight on Tuesday you post a response of at least 200 words on the Moodle forum. You response speaks to these questions:

- how would you formulate the chapter’s key argument in your own words?
- which 2-3 examples can you give of this argument (give links)?
- what was the most surprising thing you have learnt from this reading?

Each week two students are scheduled to prepare a reading presentation and moderation of 15 minutes. They will summarize the readings and forum responses for 3-4 minutes. Then they start and moderate a general discussion focusing on 2-3 questions. The two students meet on Monday by the latest to agree on:

- your division of labor
- overall objective
- presentation’s format (possibilities include: focus on 1 music video; handouts; divide into smaller groups; formal debate; quiz or contest)
- a Powerpoint/Prezi/Keynote presentation (not necessary)
- image, video and/or audio selections

Originality in this moderation will yield better points! All other students are obviously prepared to answer questions and participate.
**7 Research project**

This component is the most important of the course. It can be on any musical genre, sector, artist, group, scene, country, city, technology, or tradition, but it must include clear relevance to the Lib Ed theme Diversity and Social Justice.

Your research will be more precise and pleasurable if you follow your own musical and intellectual passions. The idea is not to be exhaustive but to get a taste of the excitement, methodological issues, and the planning of research within urban and/or cultural geography. Data is the raw material what you gather, academic literature is what you require to analyze, interpret, compare, and contextualize the data. Other people’s research in scholarly literature is your necessary first step for understanding the concepts you will need. Then you will go “out there” - whether real places in the Twin Cities, cyberspace, or the “space” of music or documents - and collect data yourself. You will not write a celebration of your favorite band: keep a critical distance. Further specifics about the research process will be discussed extensively in class.

The following intermittent deadlines (all on midnight, Sunday) for the various stages of the project are to help you with time management and encourage discussion of progress amongst yourselves. You are asked to submit the following by email:

- **Sunday 8 February** topic, tentative title, and abstract (300 words)
- **22 February** bibliography of at least 3 books and 7 articles
- **15 March** methods & action plan (400 words)
- **29 March** report research activities & problems (400 words)
- **26 April** email first draft of paper by email
- **10 May** final draft by email and hard copy (414 Social Sciences)

Formal requirements of the research paper:
- **title page** with name, course title, term, paper title, and image
- **section headings** are compulsory
- **12-point font of your choice, 1.5 spacing, justified both sides**
- **illustrations** are strongly encouraged (photographs, maps, graphs, video stills, advertisements, etc.),
- **10 pages excluding** illustrations, title page, bibliography, and any appendices (e.g. interview material, statistics, websites).

The research presentation during the last two classes will take no longer than 12 minutes, including any short video clips or music fragments. Make sure you clearly say: 1) what you intended to find out in your study, 2) how it is interesting within the framework of Diversity and Social Justice, 3) how you relate it to the literature 4)
what general conclusions can be drawn from your study. You are encouraged to use a variety of materials to support their talk (audio, video, mags, CDs or LPs, etc.). Discuss your technological requirements with the instructor in advance. PowerPoint presentations and links are to be emailed by Tuesday night.

**8 Recurring case studies**

The course book gives hundreds of examples but the course will focus on the following. Students are encouraged to share more examples through Moodle.

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<td>Symphony in 60: Romeo and Juliette and Westside Story</td>
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<td>Feb 4</td>
<td>The music industry 1</td>
<td>ch 3 Music and movement</td>
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<td>ch 10 Marketing place</td>
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<td>The music industry 3</td>
<td>ch 11 Terra Digitalia?</td>
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<td>Music and identity 1</td>
<td>ch 4 The place of lyrics</td>
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<td>Mar 4</td>
<td>Music and identity 2</td>
<td>ch 6 Music communities</td>
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<td>Music scenes and patriarchy</td>
<td>ch 5 Sounds and scenes + ch 9, pp. 204-220</td>
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<td>Apr 1</td>
<td>Music and global inequality</td>
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<td>Transnational soundscapes</td>
<td>ch 8 A world of flows + excerpts on Moodle</td>
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<td>Social control through music</td>
<td>ch 9 Aural architecture, pp 192-203 + excerpts on Moodle</td>
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<td>Music and emancipation: conclusions</td>
<td>ch 12 The long and winding road... + excerpts on Moodle</td>
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<td>Apr 27</td>
<td>STUDENT PRESENTATIONS</td>
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10 Grading

Your grade reflects your successful involvement in the course:

- 10% attendance, Moodle responses, and overall participation
- 10% group presentation/moderation
- 25% research project (progress and final paper)
- 10% research presentation
- 15% midterm exam
- 20% final exam
- 10% field trip reports

11 Finding academic literature

The paper has to refer to at least 3 academic books and 7 journal articles. Every semester there is someone who claim they cannot find relevant literature. This is impossible, since academics do research on almost everything. Almost: if you’re not finding something you need to broaden your search terms. For example, if your topic is the influence of West Coast on First Nation Canadian hiphop you should contextualize that phenomenon by first using literature about youth, popular music, and politics to frame your topic; then read on indigenous politics in Canada in general; then on what characterizes West Coast hiphop; see what academics have written about minority hiphop elsewhere in the world For most topics you’ll find more popular sources (music magazines, Native publications, websites, Wikipedia, etc.) and of course you should use them (10-15 titles). But it is necessary to understand what’s really going on by using academic literature.


The following are some good academic books on popular music studies, sound studies, and music geography, with which you can start. There are hundreds more journal articles!


Gandy, Matthew and Benny Nilsen, eds. 2014 *The Acoustic City*. Berlin, Germany, jovis.


