Syllabus

Course Goal:
The goal of this course is to give student songwriters the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills in songwriting.

Method:
Song is the oldest musical form established in all eras and cultures. Ancient Greek and African musicians used song for recreation, to preserve communal memory and to link the visible world with the invisible. Music making was rooted in mythology, legends and folklore, and was associated with gods, ancestors and heroes. The musician, through his/her technique, had to be able to combine sounds and images through the use of voice, gesture, dance, and instruments to form a musical reminiscence.

In this workshop, songwriting will be examined as both a musical and cultural practice. Each student will develop songwriting techniques through the exploration of historical, cultural and musical aspects of songwriting. Students’ weekly assignments will include readings, designated listening, song analyses, group and individual songwriting exercises. Original work will be submitted by students for discussion and critique. Pieces will be analyzed for sound, harmony, melody, rhythm, form and lyric content. Exercises in songwriting will embrace all styles of music, provided the works are original compositions. Writings by composers and songwriters about their work will be examined to shed light on the creative process.

Student Requirements:
To learn the basic tools of songwriting: lyric organization, chords, chord progressions, and scales needed to form melodies. To learn theoretical concepts behind the harmonic, rhythmic, melodic, lyric and formal structure of various styles of song. To explore the work and practice of model songwriters through listening, readings and creative imitation. To collaborate with fellow students during the course of the semester, creating new songs.

Student Assignments:
Weekly: Analyze assigned songs for scales, chord progressions, form, lyric structure, etc.
Compose songs
Listen to professional/successful songwriters
Weekly critiques of class work

Midterm and Final Exam:
A written exam on concepts, tune structures, chords, scales, song history
Final Project:
Submit portfolio of original songs
Participation in performance of original works created during the semester
To demonstrate a knowledge of songwriting as a musical and cultural practice

Required Books and Materials:
Song Writing, A Complete Guide to the Craft, by Stephen Citron
WRITING BETTER LYRICS 2E, by Pat Pattison

Recommended Books:
Songwriting: Essential Guide to Lyric Form and Structure: Tools and Techniques for Writing Better Lyrics (Songwriting Guides), (Paperback), by Pat Pattison
Chord Progressions For Songwriters, by Richard Scott
The Craft and Business of Songwriting, by John Braheny
History of Song, (Paperback), by Denis Stevens
American Popular Song: The Great Innovators 1900-1950, by Alec Wilder
Melody in Songwriting, by Jack Perricone
That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader, (Paperback), by Murray Forman, Mark Anthony Neal

Grading Policy:
Letter grade. Students will be graded according to (1) their weekly work and participation in class, (2) the written exam, and (3) the final project. These grades will average out to your final grade.
Attendance, tardiness, and leaving class early will affect final grade.

Approximate Class Schedule
Week 1-2
Get acquainted; short talk about our vision for this class
Review syllabus
Songwriting, reading, listening assignments (assigned each week)

Week 3-4
Introduction to theories and practices
Share song analyses
Critique of successful songwriters
Assignments
Bring in two songs (disc, tape, or perform) and analyze why you like them (lyric, melody, style, rhythm,
Week 4-5
Discussion of song forms (vocal and instrumental)
Interaction of harmony, melody, rhythm, sound, lyrics and cadence
Lyric writing discussion, exercise in writing lyrics
Contrasting sections: Verse/Prechorus/Chorus etc.
Critique of student work
Review

Week 6
Midterm
Presentations (students discuss favorite songwriter, their work, techniques, etc.)
Song performances and critique

Week 7-8
Harmonic practice in contemporary popular music, including chord progressions, etc.
Exercises in constructing melodies (call and response melodies, short verse and chorus melodies) phrase length, etc.
Sharing of song analyses
Critique of student work

Week 9-10
Chords, blues progressions, modulation, advanced harmonic techniques
Imitation: modeling historic song forms
The Lyric Story: verse types
Critique of student work

Week 11-12
Scales, modes, rhythms, sounds: further discussion on options for continuation (how to keep listeners interested)
Exploration of the evolution of song form: alternative and other musical considerations in songwriting
Business aspects of songwriting: publishing, licensing, jingles, etc.
Critique of student work
Written test review

Week 13-14
Written test
Spot songwriting exam
Submission of final song portfolios
Student performances
Critique of student work
Party