Gallatin School of Individualized Study
Songwriting
ARTS-UG 1325
Fall 2014
Tuesday 3:30-6:10PM
The Collective, 541, 6th Ave., NY, NY, 10011
Bill Rayner
Wsr1@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 2-3PM, room 429, 1 Washington Pl.

Syllabus

Course description
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 explored as both a musical and cultural practice. Each student will develop songwriting techniques through the study of historical, cultural and musical aspects of songwriting.

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

Learning Goals:
Methods and techniques in the preparation of sound, harmony, melody, lyric and form will be examined and utilized to create songs. Students will investigate practices in lyric writing, conveying narrative, point of view, scansion, and prosody.

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 afford the opportunity to explore composing various styles of music and song forms. Writings by composers and songwriters about their work will be examined to shed light on the creative process.

Student Requirements:
1. This class requires active participation. To be considered in good standing students must attend regularly; engage in class activities and access online class resources and assignments when prompted.
2. To learn the basic tools of songwriting: lyric organization, chords, chord progressions, and scales needed to form melodies.
3. To learn theoretical concepts behind harmonic, rhythmic, melodic, lyric and formal practices. To explore the work and practice of model songwriters through listening, readings and creative imitation.
4. To collaborate with fellow students during the course of the semester to create new songs.
5. When directed read assigned articles and texts for class discussion.

Student Assignments:

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

Midterm and Final Exam:
A written exam on concepts, tune structures, chords, scales, song history

Final Project:
1. Submit portfolio of original songs
2. Participation in performance of original works created during the semester
3. To demonstrate a knowledge of songwriting as a musical and cultural practice

Required Books and Materials:

Texts:
Author: Daniel J. Levitin
Priority: Required Text
Title: The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human
Edition:
Publisher: Penguin Group
Reuse: Fall

Author: Citron, Stephen
Priority: Required Text
Title: Songwriting: a complete guide to the craft
Edition:
Publisher: W. Morrow
Reuse: Fall

Author: Rikky Rooksby
Priority: Required Text
Title: The Songwriting Sourcebook: How to Turn Chords into Great Songs
Edition:
Publisher: Hal Leonard Corporation; Revis
Reuse: Fall
**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. Attendance and participation 30%  
2. Weekly assignments 20%  
3. Research paper 20%  
4. Final project 30%  

These grades will average out to your final grade.  
Attendance, tardiness, and leaving class early will affect final grade.  
Attendance policy: Class starts punctually at 3:30PM. Two lates equal an absence; two absences affect your grade.

**Approximate Class Schedule**

**Week 1-2**

1. Get acquainted; short talk about our vision for this class  
2. Review syllabus  
3. Songwriting, listening assignments (assigned each week)  
4. Reading: Songwriting: a complete guide to the craft, chapters 1-2  
5. Reading The Songwriting Sourcebook: How to Turn Chords into Great Songs  
   Introductions, Chapter 1, The Three-chord song, read and complete exercises  
   (This book will be used as basis for song assignments due weeks 5-6)

**Week 3-4**

1. Introduction to theories and practices  
2. Share song analyses  
3. Critique of successful songwriters
4. Assignments
5. Bring in two songs (disc, tape, or perform) and analyze why you like them (lyric, melody, style, rhythm, etc.)
6. Reading: Songwriting: a complete guide to the craft, chapters 3-4
7. Reading The Songwriting Sourcebook: How to Turn Chords into Great Songs
   Introductions, Chapter 2, The Four-chord song, read and complete exercises

Week 4-5
1. Discussion of song forms (vocal and instrumental)
2. Interaction of harmony, melody, rhythm, sound, lyrics and cadence
3. Lyric writing discussion, exercise in writing lyrics
4. Contrasting sections: Verse/Prechorus/Chorus etc.
5. Critique of student work, songs based on The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human
6. Review

Week 6
1. Midterm
2. Presentations (students discuss favorite songwriter, their work, techniques, etc.)
3. Song performances and critique
4. Reading: Songwriting: a complete guide to the craft, chapters 5-6
5. The Songwriting Sourcebook: How to Turn Chords into Great Songs
   Chapters 5-6, Adding flat degree chords, reverse polarity – playing with majors and minors, complete exercises

Week 7-8
1. Harmonic practice in contemporary popular music, including chord progressions, etc.
2. Exercises in constructing melodies (call and response melodies, short verse and chorus melodies) phrase length, etc.
3. Sharing of song analyses
4. Critique of student work
5. Reading: Songwriting: a complete guide to the craft, chapters 7-8
6. Reading The Songwriting Sourcebook: How to Turn Chords into Great Songs
   Introductions, Chapter 6, Songs in a minor key

Week 9-10
1. Chords, blues progressions, modulation, advanced harmonic techniques
2. Imitation: modeling historic song forms
3. The Lyric Story: verse types
4. Critique of student work
Week 11-12
1. Scales, modes, rhythms, sounds: further discussion on options for continuation (how to keep listeners interested)
2. Exploration of the evolution of song form: alternative and other musical considerations in songwriting
3. Business aspects of songwriting: publishing, licensing, jingles, etc.
4. Critique of student work
5. Written test review

Week 13-14
1. Written test
2. Spot songwriting exam
3. Submission of final song portfolios
4. Student performances
5. Critique of student work
6. Culminating class performance

"As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html )"