

Music 170
Topics in History, Culture, and Analysis
The LP

Spring 2023
Mondays 2:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.
Morrison Hall 242

David H. Miller
Office: Morrison Hall 226
Office hours: Mondays 12:30 p.m.–2:00 p.m., Tuesdays 11:00 a.m.—12:30 p.m.,
or by appointment
dhmiller@berkeley.edu –or– dmill629@gmail.com

Course description:

The LP, or "long playing," record revolutionized the musical world when it was first introduced in 1948. This course will consider the second half of the twentieth century—what is sometimes referred to as "the album era"—in an effort to understand how the format of the LP shaped the production, circulation, and reception of various kinds of music. Topics will include the rise of the concept album in the popular music of the 1960s and 70s, "scratching" vinyl records as a key component of early hip-hop aesthetics, the LP's transformative impact on the economics of the classical music industry, and the renewed interest in record collecting over the past decade. Students will have the opportunity to pursue a final research project on music of any genre.

Course outline:

- January 30 & February 6: *I. Defining LP culture*
- February 13, March 6, March 13, & March 20: *II. Concept albums and the "album era"*
- April 3 & April 10: *III. LP culture and more recent music*
- April 17 & April 24: *IV. Record collecting and the vinyl revival*

Important dates:

- February 13: Short essay #1 due at the beginning of class
- February 20: NO CLASS (Presidents Day)
- February 27: NO CLASS (Dr. Miller out of town)
- March 20: Short essay #2 due at the beginning of class
- March 27: NO CLASS (spring break)
- April 3: Final project proposal and annotated bibliography due by the end of the day
- May 1 (RRR week): Final project presentations; written component of project due by the end of the day
- May 2–12 (exact times TBD): Oral exams

Course requirements and grading:

- Attendance: 20%
- Participation, preparation, and engagement: 20%
- Short essays (2): 20%
- Final project proposal and annotated bibliography: 5%
- Final project and presentation: 25%
- Oral exam: 10%

Texts:

You are not required to purchase any texts for this course. All readings will be made available in the “Files” section of the course website or will be accessible via a link. All of the assigned listening can be accessed for free on Spotify, YouTube, or through the music library; if you have any trouble finding anything, just let me know and I can assist you.

Attendance:

Each student is permitted one unexcused absence over the course of the semester; additional absences will result in a deduction from your final grade. That being said, I tend to be generous with excused absences, especially when given advance notice. *If there is a legitimate reason you cannot attend class (including but not limited to illness, mental health challenges, family commitments, job interviews, and travel for work or sports), please let me know at least a few days in advance. I will very likely grant you an excused absence, and your grade will not suffer as a result.*

Participation, preparation, and engagement:

It is crucial that all of us are fully present and engaged during our time together. As such, “participation” and “engagement” refer not only to participating in class discussions, but also to your general level of attention during class, your willingness to fully commit to the unfamiliar modes of performances we will be engaging in, and your communication with me outside of class (e.g. emails, office hours, etc.)

Since this is an upper-division seminar, many of the assigned readings are fairly advanced, and will demand your full attention. I recommend starting the assigned reading at least a few days ahead of class and taking notes as you read. Be sure, too, that you have a setup that allows you to access your notes as well as the readings themselves during class discussions.

A note on writing, proofreading, and citations:

Please make every effort to ensure that your writing is clearly organized and free of typos. Before handing in any piece of writing, take a few moments to proofread what you have written. In addition, note that we will be using the Chicago Manual of Style in this course to format citations and references to musical works. For further details on this, please take a few moments to read “Music Writing Style Guide” (posted in the “Files” section of the course website) prior to completing your first writing assignment.

Technology policy:

Laptops and tablets are permitted in class. Please do your best to use these devices only for referring to course readings and taking notes.

Disability accommodations:

Students with disabilities that affect their ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements are encouraged to notify me so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. Further information is available from the Disabled Students’ Program website at <http://dsp.berkeley.edu>.

Academic misconduct and plagiarism:

Any instance of plagiarism or other academic dishonesty will result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct. According to the Berkeley Campus Code of Conduct, “Plagiarism includes use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source.” Furthermore, “All persons engaged in research at the University are responsible for adhering to the highest standards of intellectual honesty and integrity in research.” This statement is available at the website on official campus policies and procedures at <http://campuspol.chance.berkeley.edu/index.cfm>, under the keyword “plagiarism.”

Homework assignments

A few things to note:

- Assignments are subject to change and probably *will* change during some weeks; I will notify you when that is the case.
- Reading and listening assignments are listed in the order in which I recommend completing them.
- Prompts for the two short essays can be found at the end of this document.
- Details regarding the final project and oral exam will be distributed later in the semester. The exam will be open-book and open-note.

I. Defining LP culture

January 30

- Read:
 - Richard Osborne—Chapter 5, “The LP,” from *Vinyl: A History of the Analogue Record*
 - Jonathan Sterne—“33^{1/3} rpm,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 33.3 (2021)
 - Eric Harvey—“Ritual,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 33.3 (2021)

February 6

- Read:
 - Mikkel Vad—“The Album Cover,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 33.3 (2021)
 - Janet Borgerson and Jonathan Schroeder—Introduction from *Designed for Hi-Fi Living: The Vinyl LP in Midcentury America* (2018)
 - Ismael López Medel—“The death and resurrection of the album cover,” *index.comunicación* 4.1 (2014)
- Do:
 - Go to a local record shop and buy a record based solely on the visual appeal of its album cover. Then, play the record and see if the music matches what you thought it might sound like based on the cover. Bring your record to class and come prepared to discuss your findings!
 - \$10 cash will be provided to you for this assignment.
 - Record shops near campus include: Amoeba Music (Telegraph), Rasputin Music (Telegraph), Hercules Records (Alcatraz near Ashby BART), Groove Yard (Claremont near intersection with College), Open Mind Music (Rockridge), Stranded Records (Rockridge), Dave’s Record Shop (San Pablo near North Berkeley BART)

II. Concept albums and the “album era”

February 13

- Short essay #1 due *at the beginning of class* today!
- Listen:
 - The Beatles—*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967)
 - The Byrds—*Fifth Dimension* (1966)
 - Jefferson Airplane—*After Bathing at Baxter's* (1967)
- Read:
 - James Grier—““What a Concept! What, a Concept? What Concept?” The Byrds, Jefferson Airplane, and the Early Days of the Concept Album,” *Journal of Musicology* 39.2 (2022)

February 20—NO CLASS (Presidents' Day)

February 27—NO CLASS (Dr. Miller out of town)

March 6

- Listen:
 - Carole King—*Tapestry* (1971)
 - Joni Mitchell—*Blue* (1971)
- Read:
 - Loren Glass—“Introduction: The Mother of Us All,” from *33 1/3: Tapestry*
 - Sheila Whiteley—Chapter 6, “The lonely road: Joni Mitchell, *Blue*, and female subjectivity,” from *Women and Popular Music*

March 13

- Listen:
 - Jordi Savall, La Capella Reial de Catalunya, and Hespèrion XX—*Alfonso X el Sabio: Cantigas de Santa Maria: Strela do dia* (1993)
- Read:
 - Alon Schab—“The Concept Album and the Early Music Revival,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 40.4 (2021), pp. 323-330 and 347-348 (the rest of the article is optional.)
 - Arved Ashby—Introduction from *Absolute Music, Mechanical Reproduction* (2010)

March 20

- Short essay #2 due *at the beginning of class* today!
- Listen:
 - Duke Ellington—*Such Sweet Thunder* (1957)
- Read:
 - Gabriel Solis—“Duke Ellington in the LP Era,” from *Duke Ellington Studies* (2017)

March 27—NO CLASS (spring break)

III. LP culture and more recent music

April 3

- Listen:
 - Lauryn Hill—*The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998)
- Watch:
 - Lauryn Hill—Music video for “Everything Is Everything” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3_dOWYHS7I)
- Read:
 - Jennifer Lynn Stoeber—“Crate Digging Begins at Home: Black and Latinx Women Collecting and Selecting Records in the 1960s and 1970s Bronx,” *The Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Music* (2018)
 - Laurent Fintoni—“A Brief History of Scratching” (<https://www.factmag.com/2015/09/24/a-brief-history-of-scratching/>)

April 10

- Listen:
 - Sufjan Stevens—*Michigan* (2003) and *Illinois* (2005)
 - These are long albums, so don’t feel like you necessarily need to listen intently to every single track. Start at the beginning, but then feel free to skip around and see what you like.
 - Sufjan Stevens—*Carrie and Lowell* (2015)
- Read:
 - Zach Schonfeld—“Sufjan Stevens and the Curious Case of the Missing 48 States” (<https://www.theringer.com/music/2019/7/15/20691544/sufjan-stevens-50-states-illinois-michigan-seven-swans-indie-folk-pitchfork>)
 - Zach Schonfeld—“How 200 Musicians Joined Forces to Complete Sufjan Stevens’ Unfulfilled 50 States Project” (<https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/how-200-musicians-joined-forces-to-complete-sufjan-stevens-unfulfilled-50-states-project/>)
 - Natalie Farrell—“Sounding the “Spirit of My Silence”: Sufjan Stevens’s *Carrie and Lowell* and the Affect of Nothingness,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 33.3 (2021)

IV. Record collecting and the vinyl revival

April 17

- Watch:
 - The trailers for the 2000 film version of *High Fidelity* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OA9gPtWDiww>) and the 2020 TV series remake (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZALZLLpUkQw>).
- Read:
 - Roy Shuker—“Beyond the ‘high fidelity’ stereotype: defining the (contemporary) record collector,” *Popular Music* 23.3 (2004)
 - Sophia Maalsen and Jessica McLean—“Record collections as musical archives: Gender, record collecting, and whose music is heard,” *Journal of Material Culture* 23.1 (2018)

April 24

- Read:
 - Andrew Mall—“Vinyl Revival,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 33.3 (2021)
 - Ryan H. Nelson and John Macintosh—“Multimodal,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 33.3 (2021)
 - Dominik Bartmanski and Ian Woodward—Chapter 1, “Vinyl as Record: Several Lives of the ‘King Format,’” from *Vinyl: The Analogue Record in the Digital Age* (2015)

May 1 (RRR week)

- Final project presentations; written component of project due by the end of the day

Short essay #1

In 700-1000 words, describe what you view to be the primary factors that led to the LP's outsized cultural impact in the middle part of the twentieth century. Refer to the assigned readings from the January 30 and February 6 classes as you see fit, summarizing, quoting from, and making connections between the various readings; be sure to cite your sources (in whichever citation format you like). You may also incorporate your reflections on your own personal relationship to the medium, but this is not required.

Short essay #2

The term "concept album" is notoriously slippery, with different authors having offered many different definitions of it over the years. In 700-1000 words, choose one album that we have studied since February 13 and make an argument for why you think it is the most representative example of what a concept album, based on *your* definition of the term. What are the most essential elements of a concept album, and what distinguishes concept albums from every other type of album? Refer to the readings from the past several weeks as you see fit, and be sure to cite your sources (in whichever citation format you like).