**Queer Music**

**Gen\_Mus 175**

**Spring 2013**



I**nstructor: Jesse Revenig**

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**Office Hours: By appointment**

**Course Description:**

This course will focus on music composed by and for queer people. We will study both art and popular music ranging from the eighteenth century to today. Issues we will read about and discuss include the purpose and methods of studying music from a queer perspective, debates surrounding the lives of possibly queer composers, trends in popular music that challenge traditional notions of gender and sexuality, straight musicians who appeal particularly to modern queer audiences, and the state of queer music studies. Composers and musicians we will listen to and consider include (but are not limited to): George Frederic Handel, Franz Schubert, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Benjamin Britten, David Bowie, Cher, The Indigo Girls, Madonna, k.d. Lang, and Lady Gaga. This course will be somewhat reading-intensive, but will focus mostly on listening/viewing and discussion.

**Course Objective:**

This course seeks to provide an introduction to the basic ideas found in the study of music from a queer perspective. We will focus on issues within the academic study of music pertaining to queer composers, musicians, subjects, and audiences. This course will take into account the history and current state of queer sexualities from the early modern period to the present. Students will learn how to think and communicate critically about the intersection of sexualities and music by reading biographical, historical, and theoretical texts and by expressing their ideas in writing.

**Evaluation:**

Students will write one midterm paper of approximately **3-5** pages and one final paper of **6-8** pages. These papers will engage critically with the texts, composers/performers, and music we have covered. Further details will be provided well in advance of the deadline for each. Additionally, students will offer a short presentation of their final papers in the last week of class. This will provide a forum for sharing students’ own original ideas with their peers, and it will also give me an opportunity to offer comments and suggestions before the final paper is due.

Each week, students will complete a short write-up expressing their thoughts, questions, concerns, etc. pertaining to the reading and listening assignments. They will be handed in at the end of class every Thursday. No more than a paragraph or two in length, these assignments will provide a starting point for discussion and will give students regular opportunity to work out their ideas in a critically engaged way.

This course is intended to be discussion-based, so students will be expected to participate vigorously. No comment is too insignificant, and no question should go unasked, so everyone will be encouraged to contribute substantially to each session's discussion.

Furthermore, the classroom environment is one of open exchanges and ideas, so students will be expected to respect the opinions and thoughts of their peers. Respectful disagreement is the hallmark of academia, so differences of opinion are welcomed and encouraged.

**Grading:**

Grades will be calculated using the following rubric:

Weekly write-ups – 10%

Mid-term Paper – 30%

Final Paper – 50% (40% for the paper itself, 10% for the in-class presentation)

Attendance and Participation – 10%

**Attendance policy:**

Attendance will be taken each day at the beginning of class. Being present for class discussions allows you to get as much from this course as possible, both by working out your ideas with others, and by listening to the thoughts of your colleagues. Students are allowed **2 unexcused absences** for the quarter. Please simply email the instructor before class if you will be unable to attend.

**Required Text (available at Beck's Bookstore):**

*Queering the Pitch* (Second Edition), edited by Phillip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas. New York: Routledge, 2006. (Hereafter, QtP)

**Highly Recommended (available on Amazon, BarnesandNoble.com, etc.)**

*Queering the Popular Pitch*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga. New York: Routledge, 2006.

**Additional Helpful Resources:**

*Oxford Music Online* (available through the Main Library and Music Library websites)

[www.lyrics.com](http://www.lyrics.com) (excellent source for pop music lyrics, and easily searchable)

I will post supplementary readings and all audio/video on Blackboard so as not to necessitate a course packet. Save money, save the Earth!

**Schedule of Class Meetings:**

**Week 1: What is Queer Music?**

April 4:

Introductory discussion

**Week 2: An Instroduction to Queer Musicology**

April 9:

Wayne Koestenbaum, “Queering the Pitch: A Posy of Definitions and Impersonations” (QtP, 1-5)

Philip Brett, “Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet” (QtP, 9-26)

April 11:

Suzanne G. Cusick, “On a Lesbian Relationship With Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight” (QtP, 67-83)

**Week 3: “Was George Frideric Handel Gay?”**

April 16:

Reading:

Gary C. Thomas, “’Was George Frideric Handel Gay?’: On Closet Questions and Cultural Politics” (QtP, 155-203)

April 18:

Reading:

Ellen Harris, “Homosexual Context and Identity: reflections on the reception of *Handel as Orpheus*,” in *Queer People: Negotiations and Expressions of Homosexuality, 1700-1800*, edited by Chris Mounsey and Caroline Gonda. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007. (Blackboard)

Listening:

*Hendel, non puo mia musa* (YouTube link and text/translation on Blackboard)

**Week 4: Eating the Peacock: The Schubert Debate**

April 23:

Reading:

Maynard Solomon, “Franz Schubert and the Peacocks of Benvenuto Cellini,” *19th Century Music*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring, 1989), pp. 193-206.

*19th-Century*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Summer, 1993)

This issue was devoted solely to the debate surrounding Schubert’s sexuality, initiated by Solomon in the above article and which is still ongoing. You will each be assigned two different articles from the issue to read so that the entire issue is covered in our class discussion.

April 25:

Listening:

Franz Schubert, *Winterreise* (recording and text/translation on Blackboard)

Rather than reading for today’s class, you will listen to the entirety of Schubert’s song cycle, *Winterreise*. Come to class ready to discuss the text, and the way the music reflects the text. Use your instincts as listeners to comment on certain words that stick out, moods created by the music that are either similar to or markedly different from the text it accompanies, and any other notable observations, and how these might allow for a “queer reading” of the cycle.

**Week 5: Open Secrets: Britten and Tchaikovsky**

April 30:

Reading:

Clifford Hindley, “Homosexual Self-Affirmation and Self-Oppression in Two Britten Operas” The Musical Quarterly, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), 143-168

Viewing:

Benjamin Britten, *Peter Grimes*

May 2

Reading:

Malcolm Hamrick Brown, “Tchaikovsky and His Music in Anglo-American Criticism, 1890s-1950s”

Listening:

Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 6, “Pathetique”

**\*\*Midterm Papers due by 5 PM on Friday, May 3\*\***

**Week 6: Women Who Love Women Who Love Rock**

May 7

Reading:

Jodie Taylor, “Lesbian Musicalities, Queer Strains and Celesbian Pop: The Poetics and Polemics of Women-Loving Women in Mainstream Popular Music,” in *Redefining Mainstream Popular Music*, edited by Sarah Baker, Andy Bennett, and Jodie Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2013), 39-49.

Malinda Lo, “Back in the Day: Melissa Etheridge Comes Out” AfterEllen.com (February, 2005)

Listening:

Indigo Girls, *Rites of Passage*

Melissa Etheridge, *Yes I Am*

May 9

Reading:

Martha Mockus, “Queer Thoughts on Country Music and k.d. lang” (QtP, 257-271)

Listening:

k.d. lang, *Absolute Torch and Twang*

**Week 7: Out Success**

May 14

Reading:

Cliff Jahr, “Elton John: It’s Lonely at the Top,” *Rolling Stone* (October 7, 1976)

Listening:

Elton John, *Goodbye Yellowbrick Road*

Rufus Wainwright*, All Days Are Nights: Songs for Lulu*

May 16

Reading:

Freya Jarman-Ivens, “Queer(ing) Masuclinities in Heterosexist Hip-Hop,” in *Queering the Popular Pitch* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 199-220.

Amy Wallace, “Ocean-ography” in *GQ* (December, 2012) (link on Blackboard to GQ’s website where the article is available)

Listening:

Frank Ocean, *Channel Orange*

**Week 8: Performing Glam**

May 21

Reading:

Philip Auslander, “Who Can I Be Now?: David Bowie and the Theatricalization of Rock” from *Performing Glam* *Rock* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 106-149.

Listening:

David Bowie, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*

Adam Lambert, *Trespassing*

May 23

Reading:

Excerpts from Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 240-264.

Viewing (choose one)

*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*

*Hedwig and the Angry Inch*

**Week 9: Gay Fandom**

May 27

Reading:

Craig Jennex, “A Queen by Any Other Name: Gay Male Cross-Gender Fandom and the Utopian Potential of Queer Music Fan Collectives.” 17-26, 38-65.

Listening:

Lady Gaga, *Born This Way*

May 29

Reading:

Kay Dickinson, “’Believe’: vocoders, digital female identity and camp” in *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*, edited by Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennet, and Stan Hawkins (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 163-179.

Listening:

Cher, *Believe*

**Week 10: In-Class Presentations and Concluding Discussions**

**\*\*Final Papers due by 5 PM on Friday, June 14\*\***