

MUSIC 43812: BOB DYLAN AS MUSICIAN

Autumn 2012: Fridays, 9:30 a.m. – 12:20 p.m., JRL 264

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Office hours: Thurs., 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m., and by appointment

OVERVIEW

Bob Dylan has been the subject of vigorous academic study for over four decades. Countless seminars, books, and articles have puzzled over his words and analyzed his role as a central figure in the 1960s counterculture. But for all of the attention lavished on Dylan the literary and cultural figure, Dylan the musician has been largely ignored. This is perhaps not surprising: Dylan's words have always seemed ripe for close reading and high-flown interpretation, while his rough-edged, often shambolic music seemingly resists such attention. His song lyrics moreover provide multiple legible connections to his role as a countercultural icon, while the music's role in that regard, while patent, has been harder to theorize. Still, studying words at the expense of sounds is an inapt approach to an individual who once stated: "the only thing I've ever known how to do [is] sing and play. I'm a musician that's all." As Dylan enters his sixth decade of incessant performing, composing, and recording, it is high time to develop a scholarly approach to Bob Dylan as a musician.

The course will develop critical and analytical approaches to a range of issues in Dylan's musical practice. These include matters of voice, prosody and melody, song structure, genre, repetition and variation, musical borrowing, and questions of authorship. We will also explore the ways in which these matters of musical "poetics" are heavily (and multiply) mediated by the social (for example, by the complex class and racial dynamics of the folk revival in the early 60s). In addition to reading a wide range of literature on Dylan and on the study of popular music more generally, we will undertake collective projects in transcription, spectrographic analysis, and comparative study of live and recorded performances.

Coursework includes weekly readings, analytical assignments, and a seminar paper.

TEXTS

(both available at Seminary Co-Op)

REQUIRED

Negus, Keith. *Bob Dylan*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

OPTIONAL

Middleton, Richard. *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990.

SCHEDULE

This schedule lists the music and readings we will be engaging with each week. Sometimes the two are closely related—as when an article or book discusses some specific music we are studying—while at other times they are more or less independent. In general, our work this quarter will follow two parallel tracks: one dedicated to a chronological survey of much of Dylan’s music, another devoted to theoretical and methodological issues in the study of popular song. After Thanksgiving break the latter track will come to an end. From this point we will devote our attention exclusively to music, having laid the methodological and theoretical groundwork in the preceding weeks’ readings. Naturally, all of this is subject to tweaking and revision as we go along and settle into a weekly rhythm. We will not as a rule discuss all of the music on a given record; rather, the listed recordings will merely provide a basic source for some of the music we will focus on in that week, both in studio and live contexts. Readings in parentheses are optional.

OCTOBER 5

Music

“Just Like a Woman” (1966, 1974, 2008)

Readings

Negus, Keith. *Bob Dylan*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. Chapters 1 and 2.

Middleton, Richard. *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990. Chapter 4.

———. “Popular Music Analysis and Musicology: Bridging the Gap.” *Popular Music* 12 (1993): 177–90.

OCTOBER 12

Music

Bob Dylan (1962)

The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan (1963)

Readings

Negus, *Bob Dylan*, chapter 3.

Cherlin, Michael and Sumanth Gopinath. “Somewhere Down in the United States’: The Art of Bob Dylan’s Ventriloquism.” In *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan’s Road from Minnesota to the World*, edited by Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss, 225–36. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Bickford, Tyler. “Music of Poetry and Poetry of Song: Expressivity and Grammar in Vocal Performance.” *Ethnomusicology* 51 (2007): 439–76.

(Waterman, Christopher. “Race Music: Bo Chatmon, ‘Corrine Corrina’ and the Excluded Middle.” In *Music and the Racial Imagination*, edited by Philip Bohlman and Ronald Radano, 167–205. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.)

OCTOBER 19

Music

The Times They Are A-Changin' (1964)

Another Side of Bob Dylan (1964)

Readings

Negus, Bob Dylan, chapter 4.

Barthes, Roland. "The Grain of the Voice." In *Image Music Text*, 179–89. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Burns, Lori. "Feeling the Style: Vocal Gesture and Musical Expression in Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, and Louis Armstrong." *Music Theory Online* 11/3 (September 2005).

Frith, Simon. "Why Do Songs Have Words?" *Contemporary Music Review* 5 (1989): 77–96.

(Winkler, Peter. "Writing Ghost Notes: The Poetics and Politics of Transcription." In *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, edited by David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel, 169–203. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997.)

OCTOBER 26

Music

Bringing It All Back Home (1965)

Highway 61 Revisited (1965)

Readings

Rings, Steven. "A Foreign Sound to Your Ear: Bob Dylan Performs 'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)', 1964–2009." Manuscript.

Brackett, David. *Interpreting Popular Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Introduction and Chapter 1.

Lacasse, Serge. "The Phonographic Voice: Paralinguistic Features and Phonographic Staging in Popular Music Singing." In *Recorded Music: Performance, Culture and Technology*, edited by Amanda Bayley, 225–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

(Bowman, Rob. "The Determining Role of Performance in the Articulation of Meaning: The Case of 'Try a Little Tenderness.'" In *Analyzing Popular Music*, edited by Allan F. Moore, 103–30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.)

NOVEMBER 2

No class: AMS/SEM/SMT in NOLA

NOVEMBER 9

Music

Highway 61 Revisited (1965), continued

Blonde on Blonde (1966)

Readings

Negus, *Bob Dylan*, chapter 5.

Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 173–220 and 268–93.

Daley, Michael. “Vocal Performance and Speech Intonation: Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone.” *Oral Tradition* 22 (2007): 84–98.

(Salley, Keith. “On the Interaction of Alliteration with Rhythm and Metre in Popular Music.” *Popular Music* 30 (2011): 409–32.)

(Pichaske, David. *Song of the North Country: A Midwest Framework to the Songs of Bob Dylan*. New York: Continuum, 2010. Chapter 2.)

NOVEMBER 16

Music

John Wesley Harding (1967)

The Basement Tapes / Tree with Roots (1967/1975)

Nashville Skyline (1969)

Readings

Zak, Albin J. “Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix: Juxtaposition and Transformation ‘All along the Watchtower.’” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 (2005): 599–644.

De Souza, Jonathan. “Instrumental Affordance, Idiom, and Agency.” Chapter 3 from Jonathan’s dissertation, “Music at Hand: Instruments, Bodies, and Cognition.” MS.

(Appleby, Amy. *The Harp Styles of Bob Dylan*. New York: Amsco, 1992.)

NOVEMBER 23

No class—Thanksgiving break

NOVEMBER 30

Music

From *Blood on the Tracks* to the gospel records; selections from:

Blood on the Tracks (1975)

Desire (1976)

Street Legal (1978)

Slow Train Coming (1979)

Saved (1980)

DECEMBER 7

Music

“Archaic music” and the return to critical favor; selections from:

Oh Mercy (1989)

Time Out of Mind (1997)

“*Love & Theft*” (2001)

Modern Times (2006)

The Bootleg Series, Vol. 8: Tell-Tale Signs (2008)

WEEK OF DECEMBER 10

(Date TBD)

Mini-conference / analytical colloquium (one-day extravaganza, equivalent to two class meetings), including student presentations and

Music

Dylan today:

Tempest (2012)