

DePaul University  
School for New Learning  
Spring 2009

Syllabus:

## **AI 185 The Beatles and the Creative Process**

Faculty: John Kimsey, Ph.D.  
Office: SNL 3<sup>rd</sup> floor suite, Lewis Building, 25 E. Jackson  
Voicemail: (312) 362-5942  
E-mail: [jkimsey@depaul.edu](mailto:jkimsey@depaul.edu)  
Day/Time: Thursdays, 4/2 – 6/11, 6-9 pm  
Location: Loop campus, room TBA

### **Course description:**

The Beatles are significant in many ways: they were an unprecedented show business phenomenon; they were leaders of sixties cultural rebellion; and they stand, for many, as a signal instance of popular entertainment attaining the status of high art. This course will examine the musical craftsmanship of the Beatles, focusing on their work as songwriters and record makers. Recent audio and print releases documenting the group's performing and recording history provide a unique and detailed glimpse of the Beatles' creative process. We will utilize these materials to closely trace the development of the group's work while using other resources to place it in a larger historical and cultural context. The goal is to shed critical light on this recent chapter in cultural history. That discussion will, in turn, highlight questions about creativity in a modern context where commerce vies with art, technology redefines performance, and an emerging global village culture transforms concepts of originality and tradition.

### **Faculty:**

John Kimsey received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago and serves as a member of the SNL resident faculty at the rank of Associate Professor. He has also worked as a professional musician and in 1992 was nominated Best Guitarist in the Chicago Musician awards. He has lectured on the Beatles and creativity at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame & Museum. His essay, "How the Beatles Invented the A-Bomb," appeared in *Proteus*, Spring 2001. His essay, "Spinning the Historical Record: Lennon, McCartney and Museum Politics," appears in *Reading the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism and the Fab Four*, published in 2006 by SUNY Press. He has recently authored chapters for *It Was Forty Years Ago Today: Sgt. Pepper and the Beatles* (Ashgate, 2008), and the *Cambridge Companion to the Beatles* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming in 2009).

**Competencies Offered:**

- A-1-X: Interpreting the arts  
(Statement to be designed by student in consultation with instructor)
- A-3-X Reflection and meaning  
(Statement to be designed by student in consultation with instructor)
- A-5: Can define and analyze a creative process.
- H-2-G: Can evaluate the role and impact of mass media or information technology on society.
- S-3-F: Can analyze the integration of new technology into a specific field of human endeavor from at least two perspectives.

The A-1-X competence addresses the course focus on songcraft and record making as contemporary art forms. The A-3-X competence addresses the course focus on such work in the social and cultural context of 1960s trends in politics and philosophy. The A-5 competence addresses the course focus on analyzing the Beatles' multifaceted creative process. The H-2-G competence addresses the course focus on the role of mass media in the development of 20<sup>th</sup>-century popular music. The S-3-F competence addresses the course focus on the impact of recording technology on the development of same.

**Learning Experience:**

A variety of learning strategies will be employed, including listening sessions; classroom lectures and discussions; print readings; journals of the readings; group exercises; and short papers.

**Expected Outcomes:**

By the end of the course students should

- 1) have an understanding of a modern creative process;
- 2) be able to discuss ways in which this creative process is bound up with sociocultural factors such as class, literacy, folk traditions and mass media;
- 3) be aware of issues and debates surrounding a) the concept of popular culture;  
b) its relation to mass media technology.
- 4) be familiar with some basic concepts of popular songcraft and audio production;
- 5) be able to place these phenomena in a historical and/or philosophical context;
- 6) have practice with close reading techniques as applied to musical/audio texts.

### **Print Texts:**

There are numerous required readings for this course and they are all available in PDF form at the DePaul University Library website, under Electronic Reserves. Just go to <http://library.depaul.edu> and click on Course Reserves. When the Search box comes up, type in “Kimsey”. When the Kimsey page comes up, click on the title of this course. The password is AI185.

It is my view that there is no single textbook currently in print that is adequate to the purposes of this course, so I have used the Electronic Reserve system to assemble my own custom anthology, composed of articles and chapters by a range of authors on a variety of topics. These E-Reserve materials will in effect serve as our print text.

### **Sound Recordings:**

The Beatles released 12 albums on the Parlophone label:

*Please Please Me* (1963)

*With the Beatles* (1963)

*A Hard Day's Night* (1964)

*Beatles For Sale* (1964)

*Help!* (1965)

*Rubber Soul* (1965)

*Revolver* (1966)

*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967)

*Magical Mystery Tour* (1967)

*The Beatles [aka the White Album]* (1968)

*Abbey Road* (1969)

*Let It Be* (1970)

Having access to all 12 is ideal. **For this course, you are required to purchase *Please Please Me, Rubber Soul, Revolver, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Magical Mystery Tour and The Beatles (aka the White Album)*.**

In addition, the two volumes of *Past Masters*, which collect the band's many singles not included on albums, are highly recommended, as is the *Anthology* CD series (or at least *The Anthology Vol. 2*).

**Note:** Avoid the Beatles' Capitol Records albums, recently released on CD. Go for the Beatles' Parlophone albums, which have been out on CD for many years. Parlophone was the band's label in the UK. The Parlophone albums best represent the Beatles' authorial intentions and are, in many cases, configured differently from their American counterparts. (E.g., they typically contain more songs, and different song sequences.) Capitol, the band's American label, chopped up and reconfigured the band's early albums, to dubious effect.

### **Evidence students will submit:**

*Class participation.* Students are expected to do the appropriate reading for each class session in a timely fashion. They are also encouraged to demonstrate that they have done so by participating in class discussion. In addition, students will submit the following pieces of written work:

*Journal entries.* Each week (excepting week 1), students will submit a journal entry (about a typed page in length) on a reading chosen from the list of readings scheduled for that week. This will make for a total of 10 journal entries by course's end. These journal entries will be collected each week. A suggested format for journal entries is presented later in this syllabus.

In addition:

*Students registered for two competencies* will submit a short essay (5-7 pages long) addressing each of the competencies for which they're signed up. They will submit one such essay (addressing one competency) at midterm time (week 6) and another such essay (addressing another such competency) at finals time (week 11). This totals up to two short essays by the end of the course. For information on essay topics, see below.

*Students registered for one competency* will submit one short essay addressing that competence at either midterm time (week 6) or finals time (week 11). This totals up to one short essay by the end of the course.

*Re topics for essays:* Students will choose topics from an array of essay questions prepared by the instructor. The instructor will see to it that the essay questions are attuned to specific competencies. Also, it's always possible for a student to write on a topic of his/her own choosing, providing the instructor approves it.

In sum, the evidence requirements for the course are: class participation; journal; one short paper; and, for students registered for two competencies, another short paper. Percentage-wise, the breakdown is as follows:

Class participation	10%
Journal	30 %
Short paper (midterm)	30 %
Short paper (final)	30 %

**Criteria for Assessment:**

In assessing work like that described above, I look for a) knowledge and comprehension of pertinent issues, events and individuals and/or institutions; b) a scope of discussion that goes beyond material covered in class; and c) thoughtful engagement with the material, i.e., with questions or conflicts raised or implied by the material. Evidence of one of these elements equates roughly with a C; evidence of two with a B; and evidence of three with an A. Other factors, such as class participation and attendance, can also affect final grades.

I also expect such work to conform to college-level standards of mechanics and presentation. I am happy to work with students on these points, on a draft-revision basis,

if students so desire. In making such assessments, I strive to be clear, flexible, forthright and empathetic.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:**

This course abides by the university's strictures against plagiarism and its policies on Academic Integrity as described in the DePaul Student handbook. An attachment describing the university's policy on plagiarism appears at the end of this syllabus

**Incompletes:**

See attachment at end of syllabus.

**Schedule of Topics and Readings**

The readings listed below are posted online at the DePaul Libraries website, unless otherwise noted. readings Just go to <http://library.depaul.edu> and click on Course Reserves. When the Search box comes up, type in "Kimsey". When the Kimsey page comes up, click on the title of this course. The password is AI185.

**Week One 4/2**

Introduction to the course; Why are the Beatles important?; Tracking a complex creative process; Composing/performing/recording; Conceptions of popular culture

Readings:

Kimsey, "Perspectives on Popular Culture" (handout)

**Week Two 4/9**

Contexts: Post-war Liverpool; The 1950s in the UK & US; Rock and roots musics; Screening of excerpts from *John Lennon's Jukebox*

Readings:

Miles, "Being Born in Liverpool Carries With It Certain Responsibilities"

Martin, "'There, beneath the blue suburban skies. . .'"

Frith, "Popular Music, 1950-1980," pp. 18-38; 46-48

MacDonald, "The People's Music"

**Week Three 4/16**

The early Beatles; Popular music & technology; Songcraft I

Readings:

Hertsgaard, "Mach Schau!: the Hamburg-Liverpool Apprenticeship"

MacDonald, "John and Paul: the Start of a Partnership"

Eisenberg, "Phonography," pp. 113-116; 124-130; 140-142; 156-159

**Week Four 4/23**

Mania, spectacle and sociology; Screening of *A Hard Day's Night*

Readings:

Sloan, "Say You Want A Revolution"

Ehrenreich et al, "Beatlemania: A Sexually Defiant Consumer Subculture?"

Tompkins, "I Want To Hold Your Hand"  
Martin, "All You Need Is Ears"

### **Week Five 4/30**

Meeting Mr. Dylan; A new style; *Rubber Soul*; Songcraft II; Changing conceptions of creativity; Screening of *Shakespeares in the Alley*

Readings:

Ebert, "A Hard Day's Night"  
Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," pp. 109-130  
Dorman & Edidin, "Original Spin"  
Boden, "Creativity in a Nutshell"

### **Week Six 5/7**

Psychedelia, spirituality and the global village: Indian and world music; Screening of excerpts from *Monterrey Pop & the Concert for George* ("Sarve Shaam"- "Arpan")

Midterm assignments due

Readings:

Hertsgaard, "We All Want to Change the World"  
Newman, "Hunting Tigers Out in India"  
Borchert, Excerpts from *Mysticism: Its History and Challenge*  
MacDonald, Excerpts from *Revolution in the Head*, pp. 164-170; 180-181

### **Week Seven 5/14**

*Sgt. Pepper* as (Counter) Cultural Moment; Screening of *It Was Twenty Years Ago Today*

Readings:

MacDonald, Excerpts from *Revolution in the Head*, pp.188-198; 201-220  
Stevens, "Intuition and Intellect"  
Martin, "Record Production"  
Harnad, "Creativity: Method or Magic?"

### **Week Eight 5/21**

The *Sgt. Pepper* debate: Transcendent masterpiece or toy balloon?; Zappa's critique of hippie

Readings:

Shoales, "Rock Music Today"  
Goldstein, "We still need the Beatles, but. . ."  
Kofsky, "Frank Zappa Interview"  
Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," pp. 131-142

### **Week Nine 5/28**

Mystery Tours; Surrealist artists and techniques; Burroughs & the cut-up method; *The White Album*, Yoko Ono and the avant-garde; Can you ever get back again?

Readings:

Miles, "Avant-Garde London"  
Everett, Excerpts on Yoko Ono  
MacDonald, Excerpts from *Revolution in the Head*, pp. 232-236

Fricke, "Musical History, Volume Two (1966-1970)"

**Week Ten 6/4**

And in the end: *Abbey Road*; Making & taking

Readings:

MacDonald, Excerpts from *Revolution in the Head*, pp. 314-316

Smith, "Following the Genius with Four Heads: Why I Became A Composer"

**Week Eleven 6/11**

Legacies; The Beatles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; Final assignments due

Readings:

Elliott, "The Mysterious Celebrity"

Kimsey, "Spinning the Historical Record: Lennon, McCartney and Museum Politics" (handout)

**Suggested Format for Journals**

For a given reading, fill up about a page responding to the following questions:

1. What is the reading about? (Try to be concrete and literal at this point; don't jump to "interpretation".)
2. Describe something from your own experience you are reminded of by the reading.
3. What is the most important passage in the reading? Why?
4. Which other reading seems to most agree with this one? Which other reading seems most to disagree? Explain your choices.
5. Pretend the reading is *not* about whatever you said it was about in #1. Pretend it's about something else, something hidden or unstated. What is this other thing that the reading is "really" about?