

CREATAHOLIC

SURVEY COURSE IN NORTH AMERICAN RAGTIME MUSIC



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Survey Course in North American Ragtime Music (Second Year)

“Just before the twentieth century began, a craze for "ragged music" swept the United States. After enjoying great popularity for a few decades, ragtime faded, as all crazes do. But it left a permanent mark on American music. Not only was ragtime itself one of the first widely popular styles of music that actually developed in the U.S., but it also played a major part in the development of a style that has been called "America's music": jazz.” - Catherine Schmidt-Jones (<http://cnx.org/content/m10878/latest/>)

Purpose and Objectives of the Course

The purpose of this course is to provide a survey of the genesis and development of Ragtime music in North America with specific focus on Canadian rags including socio-historical, economic and cultural indicators. This course will have a heavy focus on analysis and listening to fully comprehend the characteristics of ragtime style, in addition to readings relevant to each unit and a performance component.

Topics to be studied:

1. Pre/Early Ragtime: Cakewalks & Two-Steps
2. Ragtime Dance
3. American Classic Ragtime and it's Canadian Counterpart
4. Tin Pan Alley
5. Influences on Ragtime Music - African or Latin American?
6. Late Ragtime/Early Blues & Novelty Rags
7. Classic Ragtime Revival & Modern Ragtime

Objectives:

1. to provide a critical examination of the sources of ragtime music
2. to provide an overview of the range of social, economic and cultural impacts
3. to provide a survey of composers and their music, focusing on Canadian composers with direct comparisons to the United States
4. to provide the examination of specific rags to illustrate the formal, harmonic, and rhythmic characteristics

Organization of the Course

The course is organized in a seminar format with a generous amount of time to be devoted to in class discussions. The required readings and assignments are central to the course. The unit on Ragtime Dance will be a workshop requiring full participation. The lectures and tutorials will serve to enrich, clarify, and illustrate crucial issues from the assigned readings. Readings listed under a particular date are assigned for tutorial discussion for the following week. This course is designed for students with a background in music. Students should have a minimum level of Grade 5 RCM piano or equivalent and have prior knowledge of the basic rudiments of theory. This course demands a high level of reading and writing skills, in addition to listening comprehension. Students are expected to make extensive use of library materials to complete the reading and written assignments.

Assessment

Assignment	% of Final Grade
Listening Assignments (4)	20
Analysis Assignments (4)	20
Composer Presentation	10
Rag Presentation	10
Rag Performance	10
Classical Music Debate Paper	10
Listening & Reflection Journal	20
Total	100

Philosophy & Beliefs Pertaining to Assessment and Assignments

The emphasis of this course is for students to obtain a thorough understanding of the course content in such a way as to encourage as much breadth as possible. It is important to position the material to allow for as much “hands-on” learning as possible and to encourage discourse amongst the class.

Formative assessments are an important part of learning, but unfortunately are not a realistic part of university teaching. I have therefore developed my assessments to include many diverse and varied assignments that are worth smaller percentages of the final mark to allow for the many different learning styles within the class. This allows students to achieve mastery of the material resulting in a final grade that is more representative of their abilities.

Assignments focus on the higher levels of learning within Bloomfield's Taxonomy, specifically Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation of materials. Students will be expected

to demonstrate proficiency in writing, analysis, and listening which are all foundational skills within the study of music.

Analysis assignments will focus primarily on diversity of analysis tools with emphasis placed on comprehensive techniques as illustrated by John D. White in his book, "Comprehensive Musical Analysis" (see Appendix for Chart). Students will be encouraged to use a method of analysis that requires written annotations directly on the score that include both descriptive and prescriptive commentary. White comments that "intelligent selectivity must guide the analyst to make those observations which are pertinent and valid to the overall analytical task"¹, and this will be the focus of the assessment.

Listening assignments are designed to facilitate critical listening skills with limited focus aesthetics. Authenticity of the performances will be discussed as several different recordings will be presented in class wherever possible.

Historiography of the genre will be presented in a chronological format with emphasis being placed on formalistic inquiry and a brief discussion of the impact of modernism and post-modernism with regards to genre-specific characteristics.

Class time will be devoted to student-centered learning with a focus on student discourse which "pulls together concepts, ideas, and conclusions". (Ballew 1999:p115) My teaching philosophy is directed by the pragmatic belief that as instructors we must "help students learn how to discover themselves, and the best way to do this is through direct experience."

¹ White, John P. Comprehensive Musical Analysis. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc, 2003. p24.

Listening Assignments (4 x 5%)

- a) The Original Dixieland Jazz Band - Tiger Rag (Naxos)
- b) James Reese Europe - Castlehouse Rag (Naxos)
- c) David Lee - Scotty Dog Rag (David Lee CD)
- d) Bill Westcott - "Suite II Wannabe a Rag" (Petrowska CD - INGs or watch video via her website <http://indiepool.com/clientsites/petrowskaquilico/>)

Following Fred Maus' philosophy of the importance of active listening as experiential learning in the development of music criticism and analysis, students will be required to listen to four diverse rags from a variety of periods. Where ever possible, scores will be made available so that students can follow along and comment on deviations/similarities between their listening experience and the written notation.

Analysis Assignments (4 x 5%)

- 1. CDN - "After the Cakewalk" (Nathaniel Dett)
- 2. US - "Maple Leaf Rag" (Scott Joplin)
CDN - "A Rag Time Spasm" (James Hodgins)
- 3. US - "Swiss Cheese Rag Tango & Two Step" (A. E. Bohrer)
CDN - "Rag-A-Ma-Tango" (David Lee)
- 4. CDN - "Bittersweet Rag" (Stephen Chatman)
- 5. CDN - "Unofficial Green Party Rag" (Rod Anderson)

In alignment with John P. Whites Model of Comprehensive Musical Analysis, students will be required to produce formal analysis of seven rags from early ragtime to contemporary ragtime. Students will be asked to comment on the rhythmic, melodic,

harmonic and stylistic characteristics of each rag in addition to providing a comparison in two of the assignments. The emphasis is on Canadian rags.

Composer Presentation (10%)

Students will be asked to prepare a short presentation of no longer than 10 minutes in order to introduce the class to a ragtime composer other than Scott Joplin. Students will be encouraged to choose Canadian composers, although this may be limiting due to the insufficient biographical data available for these composers. Students will be asked to provide a brief overview of the composer's life and musical works, including a bibliography and discography. Students will be required to prepare a one-page handout for the class and will be assessed on both the handout and the quality of their research for the presentation.

Rag Presentation (10%)

Students will be asked to prepare a presentation of no longer than 10 minutes to introduce the class to a ragtime composition by a Canadian Composer. Their presentation will include a brief overview of their analysis placing the piece into the context of the time when it was written and comparing it to other examples from the same period. Where possible, students will be encouraged to bring in a recording of their chosen piece, or create a MIDI recording from the score. Students will be required to prepare a one-page handout for the class and will be assessed on both the handout and the quality of their research for the presentation.

Rag Performance (10%)

All students will be required to perform a ragtime composition chosen from a list of repertoire to be provided. Students will be encouraged to perform on their own

instruments. The range of playing abilities within the class will be considered in choosing arrangements of repertoire for students. Lower level pieces will be available to those students with less advanced playing abilities. Students will be assessed on their interpretation of style. Memorization is encouraged but not required.

Classical Music Debate Paper (10%)

Following the class debate on whether Ragtime music should be considered “Classical Music” or not, students will be required to submit a 1000-1500 word paper summarizing their stance on the debate. Materials from the debate and external resources, in addition to examples drawn from scores or recordings should be included. Assessment will be based on participation in the debate and the final paper submitted.

Listening and Reflection Journal (20%)

Students will be required to submit a “Listening & Reflection” Journal at the end of the course demonstrating critical thoughts and reasoning skills pertaining to weekly readings, specifically, how they relate to classroom discussions and the musical examples being studied. Students are also required to select one additional piece of ragtime music per week for analytical listening and commentary.

Course Outline

Class	Topic	Assignment/Reading
1 wk	Course Introduction/Expectations Discussion of Assignments & Readings (including due dates) Introduction to Ragtime Music	
2 wks	Pre/Early Ragtime: Minstrelsy, Cakewalks & Two-Steps Characteristics of Ragtime	Readings: Berlin: Ch2:Origins and Early Manifestations p21-29. Berlin: Ch6:Musical Sources of Early Ragtime p99-119. Berlin: Ch 5:Early Piano Ragtime p81-97. New Grove Music Online: "Ragtime" Canadian Encyclopedia Online: "Ragtime" Analysis Assignment #1 Listening Assignment #1
1 wk	Ragtime Dance Students to participate in a dance workshop instructed by Danielle Robinson of York University.	Workshop Seminar Guest: Danielle Robinson, York University Dance Department Reading: Danielle Robinson "From the Turkey Trot to the One Step: The Cultural Politics of American Ragtime Dancing," Presented at the Society of Dance History Scholars Annual Conference at Goucher College in Towson, MD, (2001) Listening Assignment #2

Class	Topic	Assignment/Reading
2 wks	Introduction to American Classic Ragtime (Joplin) and it's Canadian Counterpart	<p>Readings: Waldo, Terry. This is Ragtime. Ch3:The Classic Rag p48-76.</p> <p>Waldo, Terry. This is Ragtime. Ch4:Commercial Ragtime p77-95.</p> <p>Analysis Assignment #2</p>
1 wk	Tin Pan Alley	<p>Readings: Whitcomb: Ch 3:Origins of the Alley p39-63.</p> <p>Hamm: Ch 13:The Music of Tin Pan Alley p339-372.</p> <p>Pessen, Edward. "The Great Songwriters of Tin Pan Alley's Golden Age: A Social, Occupational, and Aesthetic Inquiry"</p> <p>Listening Assignment #3</p>
1 wk	Influences on Ragtime - African or Latin America?	<p>Readings: Floyd, Jr., Samuel A. and Marsha J. Reisser. "The Sources and Resources of Classic Ragtime Music"</p> <p>John R. Storm. <u>Black Music of Two Worlds</u> p198-205.</p> <p>John R. Storm. <u>The Latin Tinge</u> p24-54.</p> <p>Analysis Assignment #3</p>

Class	Topic	Assignment/Reading
1 wk	Late Ragtime/Early Blues & Novelty/ Stride Piano - include Gershwin and Zez Confrey - W.C. Handy - movement towards blues	Readings: Schafer & Riedel: Ragtime's Second Line: Lesser Luminaries. p92-110. Berlin: Ch 7:A Cohesive Style Develops. p123-146. Berlin: Ch 8:The Erosion of a Distinctive Style. p147-169. Listening Assignment #4
1 wk	Post-1920 "Classic Ragtime" Revival of the 70s - Rod Anderson, David Lee - The Sting, Blues Brothers Modern Ragtime - music, composers, festivals, importance of the internet, personal recording studios etc.	Readings: Waldo: Ch 9:The 1960s Revival: Back to the Roots. p164-178. Waldo: Ch 10:The 1970s: The Joplin Revival. p179-198. Analysis Assignment #4
1 wk	"Is Ragtime Classical Music?" Class Debate CD PIANO MUSIC IN AMERICA, 1900-1945 lists ragtime as classical	Readings: Is Ragtime Classical music? [www.frederickhodes.com/is_ragtime_classical_music.html] Debate Assignment
1 wk	Performances of chosen repertoire.	Performance Assignment

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