

MUSIC 121 Section 2

Writing about Music: Jazz

Spring 2025: Tuesdays 1:40 - 4:25

Instructor: Michelle Yom

Email: myom@gradcenter.cuny.edu

Office hours by appointment.

Class website: <https://music1212.common.gc.cuny.edu/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Jazz, which once flourished in the brothels of New Orleans at the beginning of the twentieth century, gained worldwide popularity through the spread of recordings and is now celebrated as "America's classical music." It has long been, and continues to be, a contested space for debating significant issues in American history, culture, and politics. Writing about jazz requires first clarifying the cultural and musical stakes within this rich and often contradictory field, and second, contributing to the discourse by uncovering perspectives that have yet to be fully explored. Throughout the term, students will gain an overview of the major styles and periods of jazz, as well as learn about the various ways in which scholarship on jazz has reshaped how we think about and listen to the music. The course will conclude with a final paper on jazz, demonstrating the research and writing skills acquired during the term.

STRUCTURE

Each class will be divided into two parts. The first part will include lectures that trace the history of jazz, from its origins in New Orleans to contemporary jazz, as well as class discussions based on weekly reading assignments. As we explore the evolution of jazz over its more than 100-year history, we will also examine the critical topics raised by scholars and critics that have deepened both the music and its discourse. The second part of each class will focus on developing practical skills for writing a research paper.

OBJECTIVES

- ✓ gain an overview of jazz history
- ✓ improve critical thinking, reading, and writing skills
- ✓ enhance analytical abilities
- ✓ clearly communicate ideas
- ✓ recognize multiple perspectives and opposing viewpoints
- ✓ acquire the basic skills of writing a research paper

EXPECTATIONS

Each of us plays a vital role in fostering a collaborative learning environment by valuing both our similarities and differences. Every class meeting offers an opportunity to practice your

listening and critical thinking skills, as well as to actively participate in discussions. Your dedication to taking individual responsibility is crucial; your contributions matter and can have a meaningful impact. Be sure to come to every class fully prepared, having completed the assigned homework. **Weekly Homework:** Annotate the assigned reading using Hypothesis. Refer to the handout for detailed instructions.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Instead of a traditional textbook, we will be reading a selection of journal articles and book chapters. All readings are available on the class website, which can be accessed by logging into CUNY Commons. If you are not yet registered on Commons, please sign up using your CUNY email address [here](#).

You will annotate the readings directly on the website using Hypothesis. To get started, create your Hypothesis account [here](#), and be sure to download the Chrome extension or bookmarklet for your preferred browser. If you experience any issues accessing the required materials, email me immediately for assistance.

ASSIGNMENTS & TESTS

All assignments must include your name, the due date, and a title. Assignments (excluding in-class work) must be typed in 12-point font and double-spaced.

Grading Breakdown:

- **Weekly Annotations:** 36% (12 at 3% each)
- **Midterm Exam:** 20% (open book in-class paper on 3/18)
- **Primary Sources Assignment:** 10% (Due 3/25)
- **Abstract & Outline:** 14% (Due 4/14)
- **Final Paper:** 20% (Due 5/16)

POLICY ON ABSENCES AND MISSING ASSIGNMENTS

I do not take attendance, and if you are absent, you are not required to provide an explanation. However, absences will result in missing in-class writing assignments, which can negatively impact your grade. Generally, I do not accept late work or provide one-on-one reviews of missed classes. I strongly encourage you to exchange contact information and make arrangements with at least two classmates to catch up in case of an unavoidable absence, such as illness. Exceptions for makeup work are limited to medical or family emergencies. That said, your academic success and well-being are important to me. If you have a valid reason for needing an exception, please email me to discuss the possibility of making up the work.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: 1) register with and provide documentation to the Special Services Office, Kiely Hall, Room 108; 2) bring a letter to the

instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to Queens College candidates, visit the website, or contact: Special Service Office; Director, Miriam Detres-Hickey, Frese Hall, Room 111; 718-997-5870.

CUNY POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic Dishonesty is prohibited in The City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion as provided at <https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-procedures/academic-integrity-policy/>.

SCHEDULE

1/28 Introduction to jazz and course orientation

- A. Jazz historiography
- B. Primary vs. secondary sources

2/4 New Orleans

- A. Ake, David Andrew. “‘Blue Horizon’: Creole Culture and Early New Orleans Jazz.” In *Jazz Cultures*, 10-41. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- B. the literature review/bibliography

2/11 Early recordings

- A. Ospina Romero, Sergio. “The Dawn of the Jazz Age in the Caribbean: Dance, Consumer Culture, and the Imperial Shape of Modern Entertainment.” *Twentieth-Century Music* 20, no. 3 (2023): 347–77.
- B. Reading: close reading

2/18 The Jazz Age

- A. Barlow, William. “Black Music on Radio During the Jazz Age.” *African American Review* 50, no. 4 (2017): 934–37.
- B. Research (digital archives)

2/25 Swing

- A. Wilkinson, Christopher. “Big Band Jazz Comes to the Mountain State: 1929–1933.” In *Big Band Jazz in Black West Virginia, 1930–1942*, 105–128. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011.
- B. The argument

3/4 Soloists

- A. Sakashita, Fumiko. "The Politics of Sexuality in Billie Holiday's 'Strange Fruit.'" In *Gender and Lynching*, 103–30. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011.
- B. Organizing the paper-

3/11 Modern Jazz

- A. DeVaux, Scott Knowles. "The Jazzman's True Academy." In *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*, 202-235. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- B. The title, subtitles; the abstract

3/18 Post-bop

- A. Magnus, P. D. "Kind of Borrowed, Kind of Blue." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 74, no. 2 (2016): 179–85.
- B. The hour will be spent on the midterm exam

MIDTERM EXAM

3/25 Third stream

- A. Gunther Schuller, *Musings: The Musical Worlds of Gunther Schuller* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 114–133.
- B. Introduction/conclusion

PRIMARY SOURCES ASSIGNMENT DUE

4/1 Free Jazz

- A. Piekut, Benjamin. "October or Thermidor?: The Jazz Composers Guild Meets New York." In *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits*, 102-139. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- B. Footnotes/endnotes

4/8 Classical music

- A. Meyers, John Paul. "The World According to Marsalis: Difference and Sameness in Wynton Marsalis's *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary*." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 22, no. 4 (2010): 416–435.

"Wynton Marsalis: Trumpeting Controversial Ideas of Classicism;" *The Guardian*, November 6, 2015.
- B. Abstract and outline peer review

4/14 ABSTRACT & OUTLINE DUE

4/15 Spring break

4/22 Twenty-first century

- A. No reading homework / write your paper
- B. Abstract and outline peer review continued

4/29 Special topic: tradition

- A. DeVeaux, Scott. "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography." *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525–60.
- B. Formatting/the Chicago style

5/6 Special topic 2: women

- A. Tucker, Sherrie. "Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies." *Current Musicology* no. 71-73 (01, 2002): 375-408.
- B. editing

5/13 individual 7-minute meetings with Michelle

5/16 FINAL PAPER DUE