

MUMH 6000 Seminar in Musicology Fall 2023
Musical Instruments in American Culture
Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9:00am-9:50am MU295

Instructor Information

Dr. Brian F. Wright

Email: brian.wright@unt.edu

Office Number: MU305

Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday 12:00pm-1:00pm, or by appointment

Course Description

“The study of material culture is the study of material to understand culture, to discover the belief—the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions—of a particular community or society at a given time. The underlying premise is that human-made objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged.”

-Jules David Prown

Musical instruments are material objects that serve as the conduits through which performers physically create music. As such, they play a fundamental role in the music-making process. Yet instruments (and the sounds that they generate) only derive their significance and power from their cultural contexts—they require people to play them, to build them, to listen to them, to dance along with them, etc. This course thus explores recent scholarly writing about musical instruments in American popular music, specifically focusing on work that situates instruments within larger conversations about history, identity, and American culture. These readings incorporate a wide variety of methodologies and disciplines, including musicology, ethnomusicology, music theory, sociology, cultural history, American studies, gender studies, African American studies, and LGBTQ+ studies. But each begins with the fundamental premise that musical instruments provide a valuable lens through which to analyze the many meanings of American popular music.

Recurring themes discussed in the course include:

- How do musical instruments shape and limit the process of music-making? How do they inform the process of listening?
- How have specific musical instruments come to be associated with particular peoples and cultures? How have those peoples and cultures embraced or defied those associations?

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- How have specific musical instruments become gendered? How have they been utilized as markers of identity?
- How have musical instruments traversed different genres? How have the meanings associated with them changed over time?
- How have musical instruments (and their uses) reflected American history and values?

Course Goals

Through this course, students will develop their own analytical perspectives on the intersections of musical instruments and culture, while also honing their skills as writers and scholars. For the final project, students will develop an extended research project on a topic of their own interest through one or more of the broader themes explored in the class.

Course Materials

You are not required to purchase a textbook for this course. Instead, all assigned readings will be uploaded to the course's Canvas site (available via unt.instructure.com).

Assignments (Rubrics and Guidelines Can Be Found in Canvas)

1. Discussion Questions (35 in total, cumulatively worth 25% of final grade)
 - a. Prior to each class meeting, you will suggest some possible discussion questions raised by the assigned reading(s). These questions can be short and informal. They are due by, at the latest, by 8:00 am on the day of each class.
2. Weekly Response Papers (11 in total, cumulatively worth 25% of final grade)
 - a. For each unit, you will write a 250-500-word informal response engaging with that week's assigned readings. Responses are due on the **Saturday** of each unit.
3. Final Research Project (cumulatively worth 30% of final grade)
 - a. Your main assignment in this class will be a research project based on an instructor-approved topic. The project will be spread out over the course of the semester into the following assignments:
 - i. Preliminary Topic Proposal(s) (2% of final grade)
 1. Proposal of potential topics for your final project. **DUE 9/17.**
 - ii. Bibliography (3% of final grade)
 1. Bibliography of sources related to your project. **DUE 10/8.**
 - iii. Abstract (5% of final grade)
 1. Written summary of your research project. **DUE 10/29.**

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- iv. In-Class Presentation (10% of final grade)
 - 1. A condensed 12-15-minute presentation of your research in the style of an academic conference paper. **DATES VARY.**
- v. Revised Paper (10% of final grade)
 - 1. 12-20-page written version of your research. **DUE 12/11.**
- 4. Participation (20%)
 - a. Your participation grade is based on your attendance, punctuality, preparedness, and in-class participation. Additionally, students will be assigned to introduce each reading over the course of the semester.

Grade Breakdown:

- A: 89.5-100.0
- B: 79.5-89.4
- C: 69.5-79.4
- D: 63.5-69.4
- F: 0.0-63.4

Course Policies:

Attendance

Attendance is crucial to your success in this course. As this is a doctoral seminar, familiarity with the material and participation in in-class discussions are key components of the learning process. Therefore, a full 25% of your final grade depends on your participation. If you cannot attend class, for whatever reason, please contact me directly. While I will try to be lenient, discretion over whether you will be able to make up (or be excused from) coursework will take place on a case-by-case basis.

PLEASE DO NOT ATTEND CLASS IF YOU ARE FEELING SICK. While attendance is an important part of succeeding in this class, your own health, and that of others in the community, is far more important.

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted in this class without a legitimate excuse. If you must submit something late, please contact me as soon as possible. As with attendance, whether you will be able to submit (or be excused from) from late work will take place on a case-by-case basis at the instructor's discretion.

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Plagiarism

It is important to make it *absolutely clear* when you are using someone else's idea(s). This is done through proper attribution and citation practices. Plagiarism occurs when you accidentally or purposefully do any of the following:

- Use someone else's words either verbatim or nearly verbatim without attribution;
- Use someone else's evidence, line of thinking, or ideas without attribution;
- Turn in someone else's work as your own;
- Turn in your own previously created work as new work without instructor approval;

If you are unsure if something constitutes plagiarism, please consult Dr. Wright and/or the web resources linked to in Canvas. Penalties for plagiarism are detailed in the following section.

University Policies

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam [or specify alternative sanction, such as course failure]. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students (Office of Academic Integrity), who may impose further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term "cheating" includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term "plagiarism" includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

See: [Academic Integrity](#)

LINK: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>

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STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

See: [Student Code of Conduct](#)

Link: <https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>

ACCESS TO INFORMATION – EAGLE CONNECT

Your access point for business and academic services at UNT occurs at my.unt.edu. All official communication from the university will be delivered to your Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect.

See: [Eagle Connect](#)

LINK: eagleconnect.unt.edu/

ODA STATEMENT

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter. You can now request your Letters of Accommodation ONLINE and ODA will mail your Letters of Accommodation to your instructors. You may wish to begin a private discussion with your professors regarding your specific needs in a course. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester. For additional information see the Office of Disability Access.

See: [ODA](#)

LINK: disability.unt.edu (Phone: (940) 565-4323)

Diversity and Belonging

UNT values diversity and individuality as part of advancing ideals of human worth, dignity, and academic excellence. Diverse viewpoints enrich open discussion, foster the examination of values and exposure of biases, help educate people in rational conflict resolution and responsive leadership, and prepare us for the complexities of a pluralistic

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society. As such, UNT is committed to maintaining an open, welcoming atmosphere that attracts qualified students, staff, and faculty from all groups to support their success. UNT does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status in its application and admission process, educational programs and activities, employment policies, and use of university facilities.

Health and Safety Information

Students can access information about health and safety at:

<https://music.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness>

Registration Information for Students

See: [Registration Information](#)

Link: <https://registrar.unt.edu/students>

Academic Calendar, Fall 2023

See: [Fall 2023 Academic Calendar](#)

Link: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-registration-guide>

Final Exam Schedule, Fall 2023

See above

Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress

Graduates

A student must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to continue to receive financial aid. Students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA in addition to successfully completing a required number of credit hours based on total registered hours per term. Music scholarships require a 3.5 cumulative GPA. Students cannot exceed maximum timeframes established based on the published length of the graduate program. If a student does not maintain the required standards, the student may lose their financial aid eligibility.

If at any point you consider dropping this or any other course, please be advised that the decision to do so may have the potential to affect your current and future financial aid eligibility. It is recommended you schedule a meeting with an academic advisor in your college, an advisor in UNT-International or visit the Student Financial Aid and Scholarships office to discuss dropping a course.

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See: [Financial Aid](#)

LINK: <http://financialaid.unt.edu/sap>

RETENTION OF STUDENT RECORDS

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. You have a right to view your individual record; however, information about your records will not be divulged to other individuals without the proper written consent. You are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the university's policy in accordance with those mandates.

See: [FERPA](#)

Link: <http://ferpa.unt.edu/>

COUNSELING AND TESTING

UNT's Center for Counseling and Testing has an available counselor whose position includes 16 hours per week of dedicated service to students in the College of Music and the College of Visual Arts and Design. Please visit the Center's website for further information:

See: [Counseling and Testing](#)

Link: <http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>.

For more information on mental health issues, please visit:

See: [Mental Health Issues](#)

Link: <https://speakout.unt.edu>.

The counselor for music students is:

Myriam Reynolds

Chestnut Hall, Suite 311

(940) 565-2741

Myriam.reynolds@unt.edu

ADD/DROP POLICY

Please be reminded that dropping classes or failing to complete and pass registered hours may make you ineligible for financial aid. In addition, if you drop below half-time

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enrollment you may be required to begin paying back your student loans. See Academic Calendar (listed above) for additional add/drop Information.

Drop Information: <https://registrar.unt.edu/registration/fall-registration-guide>

STUDENT RESOURCES

The University of North Texas has many resources available to students. For a complete list, go to:

See: [Student Resources](#)

Link: <https://success.unt.edu/aa-sa-resources>

(Note: A printer-friendly PDF version is available by clicking the green button on the home page)

CARE TEAM

The Care Team is a collaborative interdisciplinary committee of university officials that meets regularly to provide a response to student, staff, and faculty whose behavior could be harmful to themselves or others.

See: [Care Team](#)

Link: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team>

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Course Schedule and Reading List (Subject to Change)

Unit 1 – Theorizing Musical Instruments

8/21	Introduction to Class
8/23	Waksman, Steve. "Reading the Instrument: An Introduction." <i>Popular Music and Society</i> Vol. 26, No. 3 (2003): 251-261. Dawe, Kevin. "The Cultural Study of Musical Instruments." In <i>The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction</i> , eds. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, Second Edition. New York: Routledge, 2012. 195-205.
8/25	Théberge, Paul. "Musical Instruments as Assemblage." In <i>Musical Instruments in the 21st Century: Identities, Configurations, Practices</i> . Springer, 2017. 59-66. Katz, Mark. "Five Theses About Music and Technology." In <i>Music and Technology: A Very Short Introduction</i> . New York: Oxford University Press. 2022. 99-111.

Unit 2 – The Banjo

8/28	Dubois, Laurent. "Introduction" and "The First African Instrument." In <i>The Banjo: America's African Instrument</i> . Cambridge: The Belknap Press. 2016. 49-91.
8/30	Dubois, Laurent. "The Sound of Freedom." In <i>The Banjo: America's African Instrument</i> . Cambridge: The Belknap Press. 2016. 139-172.
9/1	Linn, Karen. "The 'Elevation' of the Banjo in the Late Nineteenth Century." In <i>That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture</i> . University of Illinois Press. 1994. 5-39.

No Classes on September 4 [LABOR DAY]

Unit 3 – The Accordion

9/6	Sonevytsky, Maria. "The Accordion and Ethnic Whiteness: Toward a New Critical Organology." <i>The World of Music</i> Vol. 50, No. 3 (2008): 101-118.
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9/8	Jacobson, Marion. "Squeezebox Rock: The Rise and Fall of the Accordion in American Popular Culture." In <i>Squeeze This!: A Cultural History of the Accordion</i> . Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 2012. 91-115.
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Unit 4 – The Hawaiian Steel Guitar and Pedal Steel

9/11	Troutman, John. "Holly-Hawaiians, Electric Guitars, and Glass Ceilings." In <i>Kīkā Kila: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. 130-152.
9/13	Troutman. "The Disappearing of 'Hawaiian' from American Music." In <i>Kīkā Kila: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. 153-199.
9/15	Burns, Chelsea. "'Together Again,' but We Keep on Crying: Buck Owens, Tom Brumley, and the Pedal Steel Guitar, 1964." <i>Music Theory Online</i> 25, no. 2 (July 2019).

Preliminary Paper Topics Due by 11:59pm on Sunday September 17

Unit 5 - Horns

9/18	Cottrell, Stephen. "The saxophone as symbol and icon." In <i>The Saxophone</i> . New Haven: Yale University Press. 2012. 306-342.
9/20	Walser, Robert. "'Out of Notes': Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis." <i>The Musical Quarterly</i> Vol.77, No. 2 (1993), 343-365.
9/22	Woodworth, Griffin. "Prince, Miles, and Maceo: Horns, Masculinity, and the Anxiety of Influence." <i>Black Music Research Journal</i> Vol. 33, No. 2 (Fall 2013): 117-150.

Unit 6 – Drum Kit

9/25	Stewart, Alexander. "'Funky Drummer': New Orleans, James Brown and the Rhythmic Transformation of American Popular Music." <i>Popular Music</i> Vol. 19, no. 3 (2000): 293-318.
9/27	Brennan, Matt. "Creative drummers, artistry, virtuosity, and playing time." In <i>Kick It: A Social History of the Drum Kit</i> . New York: Oxford University Press. New York: Oxford University Press. 2020. 153-205.
9/29	Macaulay, Margaret and Vincent Andrisani. "Seen But Not Heard: Performing Gender and Popular Feminism on Drumming Instagram." In <i>The</i>

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	<i>Cambridge Companion to the Drum Kit</i> , ed. Matt Brennan. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2021. 222-234.
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Unit 7 – Acoustic and Electric Bass [NO RESPONSE THIS WEEK]

10/2	Dowdall, Peter. “The bass and the early mechanical roots of jazz (1915-1930).” In <i>Technology and the Stylistic Evolution of the Jazz Bass</i> . New York: Routledge. 2018. 12-31.
10/4	Wright, Brian F. “The Default Instrument: British Bassists and Mid-Sixties Rock.” In <i>The Bastard Instrument: A Cultural History of the Electric Bass</i> . Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (Forthcoming).
10/6	Wright, Brian F. “Jaco Pastorius, the Electric Bass, and the Struggle for Jazz Credibility.” <i>Journal of Popular Music Studies</i> Vol. 32, No. 3 (2020): 121-138.

Bibliographies Due by 11:59pm on Sunday October 8

Unit 8 – Electric Guitar

10/9	Waksman, Steve. “The Turn to Noise: Rock Guitar from the 1950s to the 1970s” and “Contesting Virtuosity: Rock Guitar Since 1976.” In <i>The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar</i> , ed. Victor Anand Coelho. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 109-132.
10/11	Walser, Robert. “Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity.” In <i>Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music</i> . 2 nd Ed. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2014: 57-107.
10/13	Vesey, Alyxandra. “Room for a Breast or Two: St. Vincent and the Post-Structuralist Feminism of ‘Friendly Instrument’ Design.” <i>Journal of Popular Music Studies</i> 32, no. 4 (2020): 37-59.

Unit 9 – The Voice and the Microphone

10/16	Pennington, Stephan. “Transgender Passing Guides and the Vocal Performance of Gender and Sexuality.” In <i>The Oxford Handbook of Queerness and Music</i> . Eds. Fred Maus and Sheila Whiteley. London: Oxford University Press. New York: Oxford University Press. 2019.
10/18	McCracken, Allison. “Crooning Goes Electric: Microphone Crooning and the Invention of the Intimate Singing Aesthetic, 1921-1928.” In <i>Real Mean</i>

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	<i>Don't Sing: Crooning in American Culture</i> . Duke University Press. 2015. 74-125.
10/20	van Eck, Cathy. "Reproducing – Supporting – Generating – Interacting: Four Approaches to Microphones and Loudspeakers." In <i>Between Air and Electricity: Microphones and Loudspeakers as Musical Instruments</i> . New York: Bloomsbury. 2017. 25-53.

Unit 10 – The Turntable and Sampler [NO RESPONSE THIS WEEK]

10/23	Katz, Mark. "Mix and Scratch—The Turntable Becomes a Musical Instrument: 1975-1978." In <i>Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip Hop DJ</i> . New York: Oxford University Press. 2012. 43-69.
10/25	Kajikawa, Loren. "'Rebel Without a Pause': Public Enemy Revolutionizes the Break." In <i>Sounding Race in Rap Songs</i> . Oakland: University of California Press. 2015. 49-81.
10/27	[In-Class Abstract Workshop]

Abstracts Due by 11:59pm on Sunday October 29

Unit 11 – The Synthesizer

10/30	Rogers, Tara. "Tinkering with Cultural Memory: Gender and the Politics of Synthesizer Historiography." <i>Feminist Media Histories</i> Vol. 1, No. 4 (2015): 5-30.
11/1	Cateforis, Theo. "Roll Over Guitar Heroes, Synthesizers Are Here..." In <i>Are We Not New Wave? Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s</i> . Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2011. 151-181.
11/3	Lavengood, Megan. "What Makes it Sound '80s?'" <i>Journal of Popular Music Studies</i> Vol. 31, No. 3 (2019): 73-94.

Unit 12 – The Recording Studio

11/6	Bell, Adam Patrick. "The Studio: Instrument of the Producer." In <i>Dawn of the DAW: The Studio as Musical Instrument</i> . New York: Oxford University Press. 2018. 31-70.
11/8	Zak, Albin J, III. "Surface Noise." In <i>I Don't Sound Like Nobody: Remaking Music in 1950s America</i> . Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012. 143-169.

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11/10	Bates, Eliot. "What Studios Do." <i>Journal on the Art of Record Production</i> No. 7 (2012).
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Unit 13 – Digital Instruments

11/13	TBD
11/15	D’Errico, Mike. "Introduction" and "Monopolies of Competence." In <i>Push: Software Design and the Cultural Politics of Music Production</i> . New York: Oxford University Press. 2022. 1-22; 51-84. [Class meets over Zoom, joined by author Mike D’Errico]
11/17	Provenzano, Catherine. "Auto-Tune, Labor, and the Pop-Music Voice." In <i>The Relentless Pursuit of Tone</i> . Eds. Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark. New York: Oxford University Press. 2018. 233-252.

No Classes on November 20-26 [THANKSGIVING]

Unit 14 – Student Conference Presentations and Class Wrap Up

11/27	Presentation Day I
11/29	Presentation Day II
12/1	Presentation Day III
12/4	Presentation Day IV
12/6	Wrap Up and Final In-Class Discussion

Final Papers Due by 11:59pm on Monday December 11