Duke Ellington School of the Arts
Music Department
Course Syllabus and Outline

African-American Music History

Instructor: Steven M. Allen, DMA
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Period: 4
Room: G-19

Text:
"By the Rivers of Babylon: The History of African American Music from Civil War through Civil Rights" – Steven M. Allen

DESCRIPTION
This course is designed to explore the historical depth, stylistic richness, and generic variety of African American music in the United States. It uses the methodological and analytic tools of musical anthropology and history to develop a socially and culturally grounded understanding of black music in America, past and present. Beginning with a broad consideration of black music as a modern cultural formation – that is, as a privileged expression of contemporary black culture in America – this course charts a historical course from the resonances of African music cultures under slavery, through nationalist and racist appropriations of black music in post-bellum America and the creative resistances and innovations under Jim Crow, to the complex matrix of African American sound, text, and local and global culture in the hip-hop era. Reading and listening closely and critically into black music history, we will explore connections between sacred and secular, popular and classical, and folk and commercial music, through many genres and styles, including: spirituals, blues, jazz and soul.

OBJECTIVES
• To present a general history of African American music and its emergent significance as a socio-cultural practice.
• To develop a deeper understanding of these musical traditions within the broader American and African American cultural landscape.
• To create an awareness of styles and forms that characterize major periods in African-American music history.
• To develop an understanding of how the music was and is performed through a study of the various performers, composers, and their practices and audiences.

Materials:
• Pencil
• Binder
Student Expectation:

Grading:
Weekly Assignments – 15%
Class Participation – 10%
Quizzes – 10%
Exams – 15%
Mid-term Project – 20%
Final Project – 30%

Unit I
I. Introduction:
   A. African Cultural and Ritualistic Practices “When We Remembered Zion”
      1. Dance, Drum, and Song (Seen as ONE unit)
         a. Characteristics
            1. Call and Response
            2. Body Movement
            3. Vocal Nuances
            4. Repetition
      2. Rhythmic Complexity
         a. Poly-rhythm
            1. Time line
            2. Additive, Divisive, Irregular meter
         b. Syncopation
            1. Specific accents on important beats or words.
      3. Improvisation

II. The African Diaspora (1619-1730) “We Hung Our Harps”
   A. Birth of the Spiritual – Sacred Music
      1. Ring Shout Ritual
      2. Types of Spirituals
         a. Sorrow Songs
         b. Jubilees
         c. Double Entendre
         d. Work Songs
   
   B. The Blues – Secular Music “Forty acres and the Blues”
      1. Characteristics
         a. Trope/ Metaphor/ Similie
         b. *The Signifying Monkey* - Double Entendre
         c. Work songs
            a. Chain-gang
            b. Dock workers
            c. Prison Songs
Required Reading:


Required Listening and Analogy:

Wade in the Water  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdMwGvjEDss&list=PL6rzYfWx7X5L6ge5bRDD4xJ_BT9oykkJB&index=25

The Ring Shout and the Birth of the Spiritual  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmmTMg3e5Uo&index=10&list=PL6rzYfWx7X5L6ge5bRDD4xJ_BT9oykkJB

McIntosh Shouters  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBd1Xwg8Xx4&index=13&list=PL6rzYfWx7X5L6ge5bRDD4xJ_BT9oykkJB

Alain Lomax: Field recordings of prison songs  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvEnkoSBPmY&index=22&list=PL6rzYfWx7X5L6ge5bRDD4xJ_BT9oykkJB

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiBODTtoB7U&index=23&list=PL6rzYfWx7X5L6ge5bRDD4xJ_BT9oykkJB

Mid-Term Exam
Unit II

III. Post-Slavery America (40 acres and the Blues)
   A. Ragtime
   B. Nationalism
   C. Concertized Spiritual
   D. The Black Church (Come Sunday)
      1. Hymnody
         a. The Colored Sacred Harp
      2. Religious Practices
         a. Lined-Out
         b. Shaped-Note
   E. Black Colleges
1. Fraternity and Sorority Life

**Required Reading:**


Unit III

III. Harlem Renaissance
   A. Big Band Jazz
   B. Art-Songs
   C. Musical Theater

IV. The Birth of Gospel Music
   A. Male / Female Quartets
   B. Church Music
      1. Hymns and Anthems
      2. The Rural Church Experience
3. Denominational Practices
4. Regional Variants

Unit IV.

V. Rhythm and Blues
   A. 12-bar
      1. Rhyme and Meter
      2. Harmonic Progressions

VI. Bebop Jazz
   A. Freestyle / Form

VII. Struggle for Civil Rights (Move on Up a Little Higher)

Composer Focus
Harry T. Burleigh
Florence Price
Scott Joplin
R. Nathaniel Dett
Harry Lawrence Freeman
William Grant Still
Margaret Bonds
W. C. Handy
Thomas Dorsey
Ulysses Kay
Hale Smith
William Dawson
Thomas Kerr
Duke Ellington
George Walker
Miles Davis
Charlie Parker
James Weldon and J. Rosman Johnson

Works for listening and Analogy
Troubled Water - Bonds
Sonata Eb - Price
Afro-American Symphony - Still
Ordering of Moses - Dett
Bibliography
Ruth H. Gillum, The Negro Folksong in the American Culture. The Journal

Olly Wilson, “Black Music as an Art Form” Black Music Research Journal,
Vol. 3 (1983), pp. 1-22

Walter L. Daykin,”Nationalism as Expressed in Negro History” Social

Troubled Water - Bonds
Sonata Eb - Price
Afro-American Symphony - Still
Ordering of Moses – Dett
The Martyr - Freeman
Negro Folk Symphony – William Dawson

Bibliography
Hall, 1984.

Cimbala, Paul A. “Black Musicians from Slavery to Freedom: An Exploration of
an African-American Folk Elite and Cultural Continuity in the Nineteenth-

Cruz, Jon. Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American

Floyd, Jr., Samuel A. “Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black

Floyd, Jr., Samuel A. The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa

Graham, Sandra J. “The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Concert Spiritual: The

Johnson, Roxane V. “Searching for Rhetorical Functions in Negro Spirituals: A
Critical Analysis from the Slaves’ Perspective.” master’s thesis, Central
Missouri State University, Warrensburg, MO, 2003.
