**Music 3015: American Popular Music and Media**

**Instructor:** Rami Stucky

**Date:** August 30 - December 8

**Meeting Days:** Tuesday, Thursday 4pm to 5:20pm

**Location:** Music Classrooms Building, #102.

**Email**: ramis@wustl.edu

**Office Hours**: Blewett 206, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 11am to 11:50am.

# **Course Overview**

Dave Grohl, the drummer for the 1990s grunge band, Nirvana, loved disco. He said as much in his recent documentary, *From Cradle to Stage*. In a short discussion he has with Pharrell, Grohl talks about how he took a specific drumming technique prominent in disco and peppered it throughout Nirvana’s famous album from 1991, *Nevermind*. This technique, colloquially called the “disco flam,” featured in various disco and rhythm and blues bands of the 1970s. Examples include The Gap Band, Chic, Cameo, and the drumming of Tony Thompson. Thanks to Grohl, this particularly characteristic of disco appeared in *Nevermind*, helping to define one of the most famous critically acclaimed and popular albums in American popular music.

The purpose of this class is to immerse ourselves in the sounds and history of Grohl, grunge, and disco. In class we ask ourselves the following question: “to what extent can we hear this influence–an influence that Grohl mentions merely in passing?” However, a course on American popular music cannot (or should not) focus merely on two genres. In class, we also ask ourselves the extent to which Grohl’s incorporation of disco was unique. This question leads us back to the 1920s, when country and blues musicians would often perform similar repertoire, despite a music industry that tried to segregate sounds according to the race of the performer. This leads us back to the 1940s and 1950s, when white rock and roll artists mimicked the sound\s of black rhythm and blues musicians (who themselves were mimicking the sounds of Latin musicians). This leads us to Washington D.C. during the 1980s, where hardcore punk groups like Bad Brains embodied the instrumental virtuosity of 1940s black bebop musicians. And this even leads us to the contemporary moment, where institutions such as the GRAMMYs disregard the diverse musicmaking of musicians, often straightjacketing artists like Drake as “rappers” as opposed to “pop artists.” The focus of the class is on grunge and disco. However, to understand this music, this class makes occasionally sojourns to other styles.

# **Course Goals**

This course culminates in a community-researched and group-written paper that we then send to Dave Grohl. This paper will take Grohl’s comments and expand upon them. Can we actually hear this influence Grohl talks about? How were disco and grunge similar? How were they different? What were the precedents for what Grohl had done?

To write an engaging paper, students will work on four skills:

* Develop a keen ear for music. Become an amateur “who sampled” expert. Discuss music in musically informed terms and vocabulary. You will develop these skills by listening to a lot of music, particularly Nirvana, Scream (Grohl’s band before playing with Nirvana), other grunge bands, a range of disco artists, and several other styles from the twentieth and twenty-first century. You will also develop these skills by practicing music transcription: translating what you hear onto the written score.
  + We will listen to a lot of music together. There will be very little outside listening asked of you. I do this for three reasons. I do not believe you can really get a sense of a musical style by listening to just one or two selected excerpts a week. Quantity over quality and complete immersion in music, I believe, pays dividends. Second, I can state from my experience as a Ph.D. student that I struggled to listen to assigned music attentively. It is difficult to skim through music (as opposed to an article). I often put it on as background music as I was doing other homework, or doing housework, or riding the bus. This technique did not help me understand the music any better. Perhaps I am projecting, but I assume you all will struggle similarly. It is not a slight on any of us. It is simply a consequence of a modern and bustling life in which we all live. Third and final, I believe there is something beautiful about listening to music attentively together. There is a benefit of sitting patiently and devoting our undivided attention to a task. I like to think of listening as an ethical practice I hope we can develop together.
* Discuss music in historically rich terms. You will develop these skills by reading academic journal articles that discuss everything from rock audiences’ disdain of disco during the 1970s to the prominence (and ultimately forgetting) of women musicians in grunge bands.
* Hone primary research skills. You will develop these skills by reading through published interviews with musicians, zines written by fans, and autobiographies from grunge artists that shed light on the influence of their music and the social organization of their scene.
* Sharpen modes of argumentation. You will develop these skills by looking at how academic and popular presses characterize grunge and supplementing their ideas with your musical analysis, your historical analysis, and your research skills. What stories are people telling that we can add to, change, alter, and nuance?
* Feel encouragement that what the research and learning you do in the classroom should not be confined to the classroom.

# **(What This Course Doesn’t Do)**

Many courses on American popular music proceed chronologically, introducing you to diverse genres and musical scenes. Oftentimes, such courses begin at the turn of the twentieth century with minstrelsy and vaudeville, then move on to ragtime, jazz, blues, country, rhythm and blues, rock, soul, funk, disco, heavy metal, hip hop, electronic dance music, dubstep, etc. This course looks at American popular music in a much narrower way, focusing primarily on grunge and disco and other close genres. The idea behind the course is not to provide students with a kaleidoscopic overview of American popular music, but rather a more focused look, where other moments and styles influence how we understand disco and grunge.

Most importantly, this course does not do anything that requires students to possess any prior knowledge of drumming, drum styles, grunge, or disco. In fact, I know very little about either grunge or disco. I will help you hear some of the musical elements that I want you to hear. However, this course relies on the collective learning process.

# **Assignments**

* **Due daily:** 50-100-word reverse abstracts. In these reverse abstracts, you will succinctly give the author’s argument, evidence, and intervention to the assigned video/article. The video/article will be accessible via Canvas – Modules. Your reverse abstracts can be written down or provided orally. I will call on a couple of you randomly every day to give these summations. This will count as your participation. If you’re not present or do not give a satisfactory answer, then you do not get participation for the day. If I do not call on you at the beginning of the class, then you lucked out and get participation, irrespective of if you’re present. **(35%.**)
* **Due Dec. 1:** 2,000-word paper. (25%.)
* **Due Dec. 8:** Email to Dave Grohl. (25%.)
* **Due Dec. 1:** One Drum Transcriptions. (**15%.)**
  + A song from any of the following albums featuring Tony Thompson:
    - [Sister Sledge – *Love Somebody Today*](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6rx8soM0mJLbBmR6wRrtvH?si=dc2a78f40db143aa) (1980)
    - [Sister Sledge – Together](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1Pw5H43UGyIHYJhUFTsAiy?si=7986f42728594ae5) (1977)
    - [Chic – *Chic*](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/50wus1D2wiOjFeSvJUgnHN?si=5f18f7c20e834d2f)(1977)
    - [Chic – *C’est Chic*](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/11kZl7tk9us7umrE9lOpoC?si=f62df5026e434109)(1978)
    - [Chic – *Risque*](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4FjYF13WieFCUgBSJzUz55?si=964f3a028e8b4f66)(1979)

# **Week 1: Dave Grohl, “Disco Flams,” and *Nevermind*, and Disco**

**Tuesday August 30**

***In Class:***

* Course Overview
* Introductions

**Thursday September 1**

***Prepare for class.*** Watch the following videos to get the sound of a “flam” in your ear:

* [Daily Drum Lesson. *10 Easy Flam Fills - Daily Drum Lesson*, 2019.](https://youtu.be/HEOGP3TlbE8)
* [Drumeo. *Flam - Drum Rudiment Lesson (Drumeo)*, 2016.](https://youtu.be/5ujmfxvr0bQ)
* [Vic Firth. *Vic Firth Rudiment Lessons: Flam*, 2012.](https://youtu.be/ZJQlbDz3_cM)

***In Class.***

* [Listen toNirvana – *Nevermind* (1991)](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3IeN33Cr9jX60DxUsjHTBi?si=3635d983e68f42ea)**(49m, 14s)**

# **Week 2: Background on Grunge**

**Tuesday September 6**

***Prepare for Class:*** Read the following articles and watch the following documentary.

* Read the following article: Stafford, Paul Edgerton. “The Grunge Effect: Music, Fashion, and the Media During the Rise of Grunge Culture in the Early 1990s.” *M/C Journal* 21, no. 5 (2018).
* Watch the following documentary: *Hype!* Cinepix Film Properties, 1996. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gcqf90TTl40>.

**Tuesday September 8**

***In class.***

* [Listen to Nirvana – *In Utero* (1993)](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0BgSV1mDE5PyR652w4AEfv?si=c272d97f58504690) **(41m, 28s)**

# **Week 3: Background on Disco**

**Tuesday September 13**

***Prepare for Class.***

* Read the following article: Lawrence, Tim. “Disco and the Queering of the Dance Floor.” *Cultural Studies* 25, no. 2 (2011): 230–43.
* Watch the following documentary: *Studio 54*. Zeitgeist Films, 2019.

**Thursday September 15**

***In class.***

* [Listen to Diana Ross – *Diana* (1980)](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6lKfY13HxiD3a9ODDuMA8H?si=ae6253994af84877) **(34m, 17s)**

# **Week 4: Rock and Black/Afro-Cuban Links**

**Tuesday September 20**

***Prepare for class*.**

* Read the following article: Sublette, Ned. “The Kingsmen and the Cha-Cha-Chá.” In *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music*, edited by Eric Weisbard, 69–94. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

**Thursday September 22**

***In class.***

* [Listen to playlist based on Sublette’s article](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6GWceSxpRoOgSV6NJvaMXB?si=e9bae2f18c7d4ee2).

# **Week 5: Intro to Drum Set and Rhythm**

**Tuesday September 27**

***Prepare for class.***

* Read the following article: Stewart, Alexander. “‘Funky Drummer’: New Orleans, James Brown and the Rhythmic Transformation of American Popular Music.” *Popular Music* 19, no. 3 (October 2000): 293–318.

**Thursday September 29**

***In class****.*

* [Listen to playlist based on Stewart’s article](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0OdMjAvBVu9XAW9P8Qlyhg?si=a381940609ed4505) **(55m, 49s)**

# **Week 6: Rock and Free Jazz**

**Tuesday October 4**

***Prepare for class.***

* Read the following article: Wallace, Rob. “Kick Out The Jazz!” In *People Get Ready: The Future of Jazz Is Now!*, edited by Ajay Heble and Rob Wallace, 111–37. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

***In class.***

* [Listen to Sun Ra – *The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra, Volume Two* (1965)](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2tYOmaZ9ayEPQ86UfFaldl?si=2bdb91de0c2a4e55) **(37m, 27s)**

**Thursday October 6**

***In class.***

* [Listen to MC5 – *Kick out the Jams* (1969)](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7qwfertD8WSUvjslojD1vL?si=6526bf6b37234232) **(39m, 59s)**

# **Week 7: Halfway Break**

**Tuesday October 11**

***No class!***

**Tuesday October 13**

***In class.***

* Drum transcription #1 due.

# **Week 8: Bebop**

**Tuesday October 18**

***Prepare for class.***

* Read the following article: DeVeaux, Scott. “The Advent of Bebop.” In *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*, edited by Bill Kirchner, 292–304. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000.

**Thursday October 20**

***In class.***

* [Listen to playlist based on DeVeaux’s article](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/05fwoqWjhinMs2dT3f4K2B?si=52f5c5ffc5fc4238) **(1hr, 6m)**

# **Week 9: DC Hardcore**

**Tuesday October 25**

***Prepare for class.***

* Read the following article: Maskell, Shayna L. “The Racial Aesthetics of DC Hardcore.” In *Politics as Sound: The Washington, DC, Hardcore Scene, 1978-1983*, 45–69. Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2021.

**Thursday October 27**

***In class.***

* [Listen toBad Brains – *Bad Brains* (1982)](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3r1HpLBftrxj0166OG39ir?si=1573862872934bb2) **(36m, 20s)**

# **Week 10: Rock and Black Women**

**Tuesday November 1**

***Prepare for class.***

* Read the following book chapter: Mahon, Maureen. “Rocking and Rolling with Big Mama Thornton.” In *Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll*, 29–51. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.

**Thursday November 3**

***In class.***

* [Listen to playlist based on Mahon’s chapter](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3tZRCxhsoq7kuiAlkbKVDj?si=935843b020a44fd5) **(1h, 13m)**

# **Week 11: Grunge and Gender and Sexuality**

**Tuesday November 8**

***Prepare for class.***

* Read the following article: Strong, Catherine. “Grunge, Riot Grrrl and the Forgetting of Women in Rock.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 2 (2011): 398–416.

**Thursday November 10**

***In class.***

* [Listen to Hole – *Live Through This* (1994)](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6ryId6hT9z9tRgDliEzBj1?si=656f326c12994eaa) **(38m, 17s)**

# **Week 12: Disco and Gender and Sexuality**

**Tuesday November 15**

***Prepare for class.***

* Read the following article: Frank, Gillian. “Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (May 2007): 276–306.

**Thursday November 17**

***In class*.**

* Zotero and citation
* [Listen to Village People – *Macho Man* (1978)](https://open.spotify.com/album/5b49qO8YiAfXVaWG1uDAYS?si=xj0PL1RnQQet4V4CTx1a8Q) **(27m, 26s)**

# **Week 13: Primary Sources**

**Tuesday November 22**

***Prepare for class*,**

* Watch the following documentary episode: *Sonic Highways: Episode 2, Washington D.C.* HBO Studios, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqwr8Tn-bTk>.

***In class.***

* Peruse the following primary source cite: <https://www.livenirvana.com/interviews/>
* Peruse the following primary source cite: Grohl, Dave. *The Storyteller: Tales of Life and Music*. New York, NY: Dey Street Books, 2021.

**Thursday November 24**

***No* *class!***

# **Week 14: Segregating Sound and the 21st Century**

**Tuesday November 29**

***Prepare for class.***

* Read the following book chapter: Miller, Karl Hagstrom. “Introduction.” In *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, 1–22. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

**Thursday December 1**

***Prepare for class*.** Read the following articles. Bring in your own examples of the entertainment industry (or any industry) “segregating sound:”

* Angermiller, Michele Amabile. “Tyler, the Creator Calls Urban Grammys Category ‘a Politically Correct Way to Say the N-Word.’” *Variety*, January 26, 2020. <https://variety.com/2020/music/news/tyler-the-creator-grammys-rap-urban-category-voting-1203481571/>.
* Katz, Lauren. “How ‘Old Town Road’ Revealed a Deep Divide within Country Music.” *Vox*, August 26, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2019/8/23/20826730/lil-nas-x-old-town-road-vma-podcast>.
* Weatherby, Taylor. “Drake Says His Grammy Wins For ‘Hotline Bling’ Feel Weird Because ‘It’s Not a Rap Song.’” *Billboard*, February 22, 2017. <https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/drake-calls-grammy-wins-hotline-bling-weird-beats-1-interview-7694499/>.

# **Week 15: Ending**

**Tuesday December 6**

Group Writing

**Thursday December 8**

Group Writing