INSTRUCTOR: Professor George E. Lewis

This interdisciplinary undergraduate course, derived in part from the discipline of performance studies, examines the importance of music and improvisation to the arts of the Black Atlantic, proceeding in semi-chronological fashion in exploring creative writing, recorded performances, and visual forms in which music is a central metaphor. Critical/historical texts are used to support topics that include African oral narrative, music during American chattel slavery, minstrelsy, the music of Harlem Renaissance composers, bebop and the world of the Beats, free improvisation, hip-hop, classical music and opera, and contemporary avant-garde digital technologies of text and sound.

The course explores a notion of intertextuality in examining some of the ways in which music serves as a prime site for interdisciplinary exchange across diverse forms of black Atlantic cultural production. Highlighted are the forms and methods through which musicality has been embedded in non-musical black Atlantic artforms, whether in poetry and the novel, dance and movement technologies, visual arts, or architecture. This model of intertextuality is made possible in large measure through improvisation, a critically important and frequently referenced, yet under-theorized practice that stands at the center of the arts of Black Atlantic. Thus, the theorization of improvisation is of paramount importance here.

In addition to written and media-based materials, I expect to leaven the course offerings with visits from artists and writers working across media with whom the class participants will be able to dialogue regarding the methods and histories of black Atlantic intertextuality.

WEEKLY TOPICS AND REQUIRED READINGS

Week 1: Foundations


Week 2: African Text/Sound


Week 3: Antebellum Sounds


Week 4: Blues Texts


Week 5: Negro Renaissance


Week 6: Jazz and the Beats


Week 7: Blues Matrix


Week 8: Text Models Music

Shange, Ntozake. For colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem. New York: Bantam, 1980. (recording?)


**Week 9: Spring Break**

**Week 10: On Improvisation: Music Models Text**


**Week 11: Visual Improvisations 1**


Media: Sundiata, Sekou. Longstory Short. Righteous Babe RBR018-D, 2004; Charlie Parker (various)

Week 12: Visual Improvisations 2


Media: Morrison, Toni, and Max Roach. Performance, San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA. UCSD-TV;

Week 13: The Black Arts Movement


Week 14: Coltrane


Week 15: Technologies


Lewis, George E. 2004. The Virtual Discourses of Pamela Z. Forthcoming in the Catalog of the American Section, Dak’art International Biennale of Contemporary African Art.


SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS


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