

# MUSI 3370 Songwriting

Aurie Hsu - University of Virginia – Fall 2011  
Syllabus

**Class Meeting Times:** TR 9:30am – 10:45am, Old Cabell Hall, Room 107

**Instructor:** Aurie Hsu

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**Office Hours:** W, 12:00-2:00pm, OCH 211, and by appointment

**Mailbox:** Music Department Office (OCH)

**Course Website:** [http://people.virginia.edu/~ayh3d/AHsu/MUSI3370\\_Songwriting](http://people.virginia.edu/~ayh3d/AHsu/MUSI3370_Songwriting)

## Course Overview

What song has the most plays on your playlist? What is your “go-to” song when you seek excitement, feel nostalgic, or crave exquisiteness? Why are these songs so poignant and how did the songwriter create the song? Songwriters use songs to tell stories, express sorrow, entertain, protest, encourage introspection, and build community. On the radio, around the campfire, at ballgames, from Carnegie Hall to Madison Square Garden to karaoke night at Baja Bean, songs are ubiquitous and function in diverse and surprising ways.

We will approach songwriting from multiple perspectives – as a dreamer, a pragmatist, and a critic. This course is designed to deepen your creative, collaborative, and critical sense of music composition by integrating work in music history, applied theory, cultural studies, performance studies, music technology, and aesthetics. Student responsibilities include readings, in-class discussion and performance, composition, listening assignments and quizzes, and a concert review. Final projects include a collaborative performance at The Southern and a self-produced digital EP with scores/lead sheets of four original songs. The digital EP is intended for your fans to download.

Prerequisites: MUSI 3310, or equivalent and fluency in any instrument or voice.

## Learning Goals

In this course, we will develop a personal compositional style while striving for the following learning goals:

- Develop a songwriting practice that integrates individual and collaborative work with a focus on creativity and experimentation. To facilitate, students will form class bands to rehearse and perform songs.
- Engage songwriting history and current trends through analysis, performance, and discussion of diverse genres. Genres include blues, folk, art songs, musicals, R&B, pop, disco, rock n’roll, hip hop, and the experimental. We will also examine the compositional processes of seasoned songwriters.
- Develop useful techniques for writing melodies, harmonic progressions, rhythm, lyrics, and shaping form by synthesizing concepts from music theory and aural skills.
- Broaden aural perspective through analysis and discussion of cultural song genres including Korean-pop, Afro-pop, secular classical Egyptian, and Reggae. You will have the opportunity to suggest additional songs for study.
- Incorporate music technology into your compositional process through practice in notation software (Finale, Sibelius) and GarageBand.

- Practice professional skills through interaction with music industry establishments such as ASCAP, BMI, online distribution channels (Bandcamp, cdbaby, iTunes), and a local performance venue.

## Required Materials and Resources

*Please bring your instrument to class everyday and be prepared to perform songs.*

### Software

Finale SongWriter notation software, available from [Coda Music](#). Finale is also available on the computers in the music library. Sibelius is also acceptable.

### Text

*Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo  
All other readings are available on Reserve or Collab.

### Staff Paper

Staff paper (bring to class everyday), available here:  
<http://people.virginia.edu/~pdr4h/musicpaper/>

### Charlottesville Music Scene

[www.nailgunmedia.com/blog/](http://www.nailgunmedia.com/blog/)

## Learning Format

We will regularly workshop your songs in class. Please be courteous and supportive of one another, as we all have different backgrounds and strengths. Much can be learned from your peers' ideas, work, and feedback. The success of the course depends on your thoughtful interaction and contribution.

## Assignments

To reflect the multi-faceted activities of a professional songwriter and musician, we will embark on a variety of assignments and projects outlined below. Please refer to the class website for submission guidelines.

### Composition

- **Pre-Compositions.** The pre-composition provides an opportunity to plan your approach for writing a song as well as obtain peer and instructor feedback on your ideas. The format may include prose descriptions, graphic outlines, a concept outline, rough timeline, and/or brainstorming ideas for pitch material, rhythm, and form. We will workshop these in class. I will collect and assess these using a "check-mark" system: √+ (outstanding, range: 90-100), √ (good, range: 70-90), or √- (unsatisfactory, range: below 70).
- **Songs.** You will write eight songs representing several of the genres we study. Each song should use available musicians in class and reflect your personal style. Your song title, score/lead sheet, and short program note serves as a communication tool for your band-mates and audience. Refer to the "Assignments" section of the website for detailed guidelines and assessment rubric.

## Weekly Assignments

- **Reading Assignments/Discussion.** The reading assignments are designed to deepen and challenge your understanding of the repertoire and songwriting process. Readings include interviews with songwriters, journal articles, and online music blogs. Interaction with the readings involves engaging the perspectives presented and participating in dialogue about the themes.
- **Analysis Worksheets.** Worksheets facilitate critical engagement with the repertoire. We will explore musical elements, compositional design, performance styles, and the production value of selected songs. The aim is to describe the ineffable in music and create personal meaning around theoretical concepts.

## Quality of Preparation and Participation - Student Success

Since this course focuses on discussion and music performance, your participation is essential to its success. This rubric includes guidelines on how I will assess the *quality* of your preparation and participation.

*Excellent.* You enthusiastically, voluntarily, and discriminately contribute to class discussion with thoughtful comments and questions; arrive fully prepared for every class; respectfully interact with peers; demonstrate leadership in group activities; show steady improvement with each assignment.

*Good.* You are focused, and engaged; arrive prepared for class; occasionally contribute to class discussions; work cooperatively in group activities, show some improvement with each assignment.

*Fair.* You are present but unengaged; rarely contribute to class discussion; arrive poorly prepared for class; are passively involved in group activities; show general reluctance to participate, show little improvement with each assignment.

*Poor.* You are often absent, doze, and zone out; work on homework for other classes; send text messages or browse the internet in class; arrive unprepared and do not turn in assignments; do not participate in group activities and are disruptive to the class, do not improve with each assignment.

## Listening Assignments

• **Listening Blog.** We will expand our repertoire by listening to recordings both in and outside of class. The goal of the listening assignments is familiarity with the breadth of songwriting genres, which is essential to your growth as a composer. The listening blog is a reflective exercise to promote understanding and interpretation of the music. Attention to detail will prepare you for the listening quizzes. Recordings and scores/lead sheets (when applicable) will be available on reserve, via Naxos, or on Collab. Refer to the “Listening” section of the website for blog samples, links to recordings, and listening strategies.

**Listening Quizzes.** There will be two “drop the needle” listening quizzes this semester. When presented with an excerpt, you will be expected to name the song and explain the historical context and relevance of the song. This type of assessment focuses on your aural skills for identifying melodies, chord progressions, and rhythmic motives as well as the ability to distinguish between different song styles.

• **Concert review.** Live concerts demonstrate the magic of music performance. Attendance at one concert featuring songwriting is required. The aim of the concert review is to support live music and offer inspiring scenarios to your own performance practice. Check *C-ville*, *the Hook*, or the local music blog: [www.nailgunmedia.com/blog/](http://www.nailgunmedia.com/blog/), for concert dates and venues. Most concerts sponsored by the UVA Music Department are free or cost a minimal amount of arts

dollars. Music Department concert schedules are available here:  
<http://artsandsciences.virginia.edu/music/concertsevents/index.html>

## Final Project

Your final project consists of two parts: a collaborative performance and a songwriting portfolio in the form of a digital EP available for download. The focus of this project is to provide experience in the professional arena and interaction with an audience.

- **Concert Performance.** The final concert is scheduled for December 6, 2011 at a The Southern on the downtown mall. This provides an opportunity to perform with your band and connect with an audience. Invite family and friends to this event! A small reception will follow the concert.
- **Digital EP.** You will write and record four original songs for your digital EP and make the EP available for download on your listening blog. The songs should synthesize compositional techniques, but you may also proceed in new directions. The process of creating the digital EP models the activities of a professional songwriter and musician: writing, copyrighting, recording, distribution, and live-performance.

## Assessment of Learning

Please refer to the class website for grading rubrics and letter equivalents.

30%	Composition
	Pre-composition (5%)
	Songs (25%)
25%	Quality of Preparation and Participation
10%	Weekly Assignments
15%	Listening Blog and Quizzes
20%	Final Projects: Concert Performance and Digital EP

## Tentative Class Schedule

Date	In-Class Activity or Assignment Due
<b>Week 1: Introductory Activities, Musicianship Evaluation</b>	
T, 8/23	Improvisation
<b>Week 2: Folk Music</b>	
T, 8/25	Listening Blog Entry 1
Th, 8/27	Read/Annotate: <i>What is Folk Music?</i>
<b>Week 3: Blues</b>	
T, 8/30	Analysis Worksheet
Th, 9/1	Read/Annotate: <i>In Search of the Blues</i> , Ch. 1 Pre-composition: Blues
<b>Week 4: Country</b>	
T, 9/6	Blues song due
Th, 9/8	Read: <i>Songwriters on Songwriting</i> , Merle Haggard pp. 697-701
<b>Week 5: Early Rock and Roll</b>	
T, 9/13	Listening Blog Entry 2
Th, 9/15	Collaboration song 1 due
<b>Week 5: Early Rock and Roll</b>	
T, 9/20	Listening Quiz 1
Th, 9/22	Analysis Worksheet
<b>Week 6: Art Songs</b>	

T, 9/27	Listening Blog Entry 3
Th, 9/29	Pre-composition: Art Song
<b>Week 7: Musicals</b>	
T, 10/4	Art Song due
Th, 10/6	Analysis Worksheet
<b>Week 8: 1960s Pop and 1970's Disco</b>	
T, 10/11	Read/Annotate: <i>Songwriters</i> , Paul Simon pp. 87-122
Th, 10/13	Pre-composition: Cover song
<b>Week 9: R&amp;B, Cover Songs</b>	
T, 10/18	<i>Songwriters on Songwriting</i> , Brian Wilson pp. 123-131
Th, 10/20	Collaboration Cover song due
<b>Week 10: Rap/Hip Hop</b>	
T, 10/25	Listening Blog Entry 4
Th, 10/27	Read/Annotate: George, <i>Hip-Hops Founding Fathers</i> Pre-composition: Rap lyrics
<b>Week 11: Topical/Protest Songs</b>	
T, 11/1	Rap song due
Th, 11/3	Read/Annotate: - <i>Songwriters on Songwriting</i> , Bob Dylan pp. 69-86 Listening Blog Entry 5
<b>Week 12: Individual Meetings</b>	
T, 11/8	Final Project Proposal due; Begin Pre-compositions for Final Project
Th, 11/10	Topical song due
<b>Week 13: Music Production, Guest Artist: Dzian!</b>	
T, 11/15	Read/Annotate: Moorefield, <i>Producer As Composer</i> , Introduction Analysis Worksheet
Th, 11/17	Listening Quiz 2 Introduction to GarageBand
<b>Week 14: Cultural Forms (Korean-Pop, Classical Egyptian)</b>	
T, 11/22	Read/Annotate: Gray, <i>Inventing World Music</i> and Holton <i>Globalization Consequences</i>
Th, 11/24	No Class – Thanksgiving Break
<b>Week 15: Cultural Forms (Afro-pop, Reggae)</b>	
T, 11/29	Rehearse for performance/Work on Digital EP
Th, 12/1	Rehearse for performance/Work on Digital EP Concert review due
<b>Week 16: Rehearsal Workshops and Concert Preparation</b>	
T, 12/6	Set up/Sound Check/Concert at The Southern, 8pm
<b>Exam Week</b>	
T, 12/13	<b>Final Projects Due: All work due today!</b>

### **Additional Information**

**Honor Code.** We all contribute to the vibrant intellectual community at UVA, which the honor code sustains. I expect you to uphold the honor code in all aspects of the course.

**Attendance and Class Guidelines:** Please refer to the class website for details.