

DANCE MUSIC AND CULTURE IN AMERICA

INSTRUCTOR: Heather Mease, heather.mease@tu-dortmund.de

CLASS MEETING: Wintersemester 2022/2023, WEDNESDAY 14:15 - 15:45, R. 0.406

OFFICE HOUR: Tuesday 14:30 – 15:30 and by appointment for in-person & virtual meetings

OVERVIEW

This course traces the history and influence of different forms of twentieth- and twenty-first-century dance music in the United States alongside analyses of class, gender, race, and sexuality in the cultures, sounds, dances, technologies, and places connected to these musics. We will explore the lofts of New York disco, the factories of Chicago house, the desert festivals of EDM, and more. The class will also compare cross-Atlantic exchanges and developments such as the techno of Detroit versus Germany, and the commercialization of dubstep upon import from the UK. Film and reading assignments supplement listening-focused course materials. No specific musical knowledge or musicianship is required.

ASSIGNMENTS & DEADLINES

For the final project you will write an 800-word essay and curate an accompanying playlist/mix of music (8 to 12 tracks) on a dance music topic related to the materials of this course. You may choose to explore a topic we've covered more thoroughly or you may tie other forms of dance music into the themes of American dance music discussed. Format examples for the playlist/mix and essay document will be provided.

Project Proposal and Outline – **Due December 21 at class time (14:15)**

The outline should include your main points clearly organized along with a bibliography and a draft of your playlist (just track and artist names necessary). These are the minimum requirements but you may submit a substantial draft.

Project Presentations – **Jan 25 and Feb 1**

An approximately 5-minute presentation should condense and exemplify your topic through oral description and audio clips. A slideshow presentation may be used but is not mandatory.

Final Project – Due February 3* by midnight

The final essay with bibliography, written track listing and playlist/mix (either as a link to a streaming platform or as an audio file) is due February 3rd by midnight.

*If you plan to take the module exam (M5 Lehramt) please get in touch about handing in your work earlier.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 – OCT 12 **Introduction**

WEEK 2 – OCT 19 **American Dance Music is Black American Dance Music**

READ: Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka – *Blues People*, Ch. 10: “Swing–From Verb to Noun”

WATCH: [“The Call of the Jitterbug” \(1989\)](#)

WEEK 3 – OCT 26 **Disco and the Rise of the DJ**

READ: Tim Lawrence – *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970–1979*, Ch. 1: “Beginnings” and Ch. 5: “Visibility”
Peter Shapiro – *Turn The Beat Around*, “Disco Timeline”

LISTEN: [Larry Levan – Live At The Paradise Garage 1979](#)

WEEK 4 – NOV 2 **Life After the Explosive Death of Disco**

READ: Peter Shapiro – *Turn The Beat Around*, “Where were you when the lights went out? THE DEATH OF DISCO”

Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton – *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, Ch. 8: “Hi-energy”

WEEK 5 – NOV 9 **Just a Fad in the Bronx – Early Hip Hop**

READ: Joseph Ewoodzie – *Breakbeats in the Bronx*, Ch. 1 “Herc: The New Cool in the Bronx” and Ch. 2 “South Bronx DJs vs. Other DJs”

WATCH: [“Style Wars” \(1983\)](#) (OPTIONAL – a documentary about graffiti and breakdancing in New York)

WEEK 14 – JAN 25 Final Project Presentations

WEEK 15 – FEB 1 Final Project Presentations, cont.

FEB 3 – FINAL PAPER DUE BY MIDNIGHT