OVERVIEW

Songwriting is an introductory course on the history, theory and practice of writing songs. Students engage a diverse range of artists and their music, studying formal construction, musical mechanics, lyrics, and social context. In addition to regular songwriting assignments, coursework includes daily listening and discussion, readings & videos on topics such as music theory and music criticism, and group critique. Music 3370 satisfies the composition requirement in the Department: the final project consists of a portfolio of songs.

Learning Objectives: Gain familiarity with a wide range of songwriting styles and approaches. Practice the mechanics of songwriting, with focus on structure, rhythm, harmony, melody, timbre, recording, production, lyrics, and more. Learn approaches to generating material. Add tools to your songwriting toolbox. Reflect on the status of songs as cultural products — What do songs mean, and what can songs do? Create a shared frame of reference through intensive group listening. Develop the skills to constructively communicate musical ideas and criticism with the class. Create a portfolio of songs that demonstrates what you've learned.

This course requires a basic familiarity with musical concepts.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIAL

There is no required textbook, however the course will use a variety of free** software:

Reaper - a basic (but powerful!) Digital Audio Workstation (DAW)

Musescore - a simple notation software that may come in handy for some

Streaming service** - Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, YouTube, any platform to reliably find & listen to music

**might not be free, depending

ASSIGNMENTS / CLASS PARTICIPATION / GRADING

Projects: The projects, the songs you create for this class, comprise the bulk of your grade. The 4 projects will result in 3 songs. The first two songs have constraints that help focus attention to specific songwriting components. The last song, submitted once in draft form and once as the final project, is open to whatever style of songwriting, from classical to folk to EDM to rock to hip hop and beyond. You may use the tools you are already comfortable with (in terms of software and approach) as long as you have the openness to add more tools to your compositional toolbox. Project descriptions are below. Students will have different project requirements and rubrics at the 2000 and 3000 levels to differentiate non-major vs major work. High standards will be in place for both groups, but the expectations for the level of engagement with various musical concepts will vary.

Listening & Discussion takes place a few times each week. Each day we'll listen to a selection of songs together as a class and discuss them in detail based on the day's theme. Half the songs will be curated by the instructor, the other half will be curated by students. In addition, each student will do a brief discussion board post about the songs they've presented in class. More info on that below. Reminder: respect and understanding are crucial to engaging in contentious situations (territory which we may or may not find ourselves in over the semester) and necessary in building a good relationship as a class. Communication is important to fixing problems, so if there is ever a concern, please raise it either in class or in private with the instructor.

Attendance & Class Participation: Due to the subject and condensed nature of this course, attendance and participation are essential to mastering the course materials. Each student gets one free absence. After that, unless there's a good reason (with accompanying documentation), the grade will go down 5% with each absence. Participation can take many forms, but the easiest way to get full participation credit is to actively engage in Listening & Discussion, critique, and class work sessions. Tardiness will *annoy the instructor and fellow classmates*, so keep that to a minimum. Chronic lateness will result in a lowered attendance & participation grade.

Grading:

Assignments (Songs)	45%
L&D Discussion Post	5%
Final Portfolio + Presentation	10%
Attendance + Participation	40%

All materials MUST BE IN by June 17 at 11:59 pm. Assignments and portfolios will not be accepted after this time unless you have an incomplete approved by your dean.

Honor Code: The University of Virginia Honor Code is in effect throughout this course, as are the University's policies regarding academic misconduct. *NOTE: When using samples, premade loops, and other material that is not "yours" and did not originate with you, you* **must** *cite your sources much like you would for an essay. Failure to do so is a violation of the honor code.*

SCHEDULE

Week 1

M 5/24	Syllabus / Intros Lecture: What is a song? / Basic musical elements
T 5/25	Listening & Discussion 1: Lyrics & Voices Lecture: Lyrics - the conceptual & the technical / Project 1 intro
W 5/26	Demo & Practice: Intro to Reaper / Working with audio Lecture: Parody & contrafactum / Project 1 brainstorming
R 5/27	Listening & Discussion 2: Melody Lecture: Melodic contour / Simplicity vs complexity / Text setting
F 5/28	Demo & Practice: Recording and editing vocals Lecture: Vocal composing - the voice, the message, the melody / Project 1 check-in

Week 2

M 5/31	*******NO CLASS*******
T 6/1	Listening & Discussion 3: Harmony Lecture: Chord progressions / Beyond chord progressions / Project 2 intro **Project 1 DUE**

W 6/2	Demo & Practice: Sequencing, MIDI, and virtual instruments
	Lecture: Covers, standards, interpretation, accountability
R 6/3	Listening & Discussion 4: Rhythm & Percussion
	Lecture: Rhythm / Meter / Percussion and the drum set
F 6/4	Demo & Practice: Making beats
	Lecture: Rhythmic patterns & genre / The drum machine / Project 2 check-in
S 6/5	Office hours / Open work

Week 3

M 6/7	Listening & Discussion 5: Form
	Lecture: Sampling & quotation
	Project 2 DUE
T 6/8	Individual Meetings
W 6/9	Listening & Discussion 6: Instrumentation, Texture, and Timbre
	Lecture: Timbre / Orchestration & arrangement
R 6/10	Demo & Practice: Effects and plug-ins; More tools for your toolbox
	Lecture: Approaches to song writing / Getting unstuck / Experimentation
F 6/11	Listening & Discussion 7: Production and Electronic Music
	Lecture: Composing in and with the studio / Project 3 check-in
S 6/12	Office hours / Open work

Week 4

M 6/14	Listening & Discussion 8: Performing the Details
	Lecture: Performance practice / The audience / You wrote a song, now what?
	Project 3 DRAFT DUE
T 6/15	Group critique: Project 3 feedback
W 6/16	Individual meetings
R 6/17	Final project presentations
	Project 3 FINAL Due
	Final Portfolio DUE

PROJECTS

Project 1 – Parody Karaoke: Create new lyrics to an existing song! The theme of your new lyrics should be something you and a group of people with similar interests might sing together. For instance, a song for your swim team, coworkers, roommates, political party, community garden, reading group, songwriting class, fan club, whatever! Really consider the meaning of the original song and how your lyrics might play off of or add to it. Consider the original rhyme scheme, the meter, the rhythm of the words, the number of syllables. Practice singing it to make sure it works! Once the lyrics are written, put the karaoke backing track (for most major pop songs you can find these online) into Reaper and record yourself singing over it. Submit an audio file of the final piece along with a 200-word write up.

Project 2 – Cover Uncovered: Translate an existing song into a different genre. Examples include doing a pop country cover of a punk song or a polka remix of a Lady Gaga track. Try to pick a genre that's different enough (maybe dub and reggae are a little too close) but maybe not so different that it undermines the integrity of the original song (unless this is the point, then go ahead). Be sensitive and considerate in your choices. Submit an audio file of the final piece along with a 200-word write up.

Project 3 - Free Swim: Create a new song! You're free to do whatever you want as long as you do it responsibly and with intentionality. Use whatever musical elements. Use whatever style. Use whatever composition method. It must be at least 1.5 minutes long and at most 6 minutes long. You'll submit this project in 2 parts, first as a

substantial draft for class feedback and second as a final version included in the final portfolio. For the final portfolio turn in an audio file along with a 500-word analysis, reflection, and explanation of your piece.

LISTENING & DISCUSSION

Student Curation: Each student will be assigned a day to present 1 – 2 songs related to that day's topic. About two people will present songs during each L&D. The topics are intentionally broad so that everyone will interpret them differently. Don't worry about getting it "wrong." Each student will introduce a song with a bit of background, how it relates to the topic, what to listen to during the group listening, and present a question or two to guide discussion. 1 – 2 songs should be at a maximum of 10 minutes total. Students should email streaming links or sound files by 11 am the day of the class.

Discussion Post: In about 200 - 300 words, outline the same information conveyed during class. For each song: include a link, a bit of background, how it relates to the topic, the discussion questions, and anything else relevant (e.g. lyrics, score). The discussion post should be up within 24 hours of the L&D session. This will also give students the opportunity to look back, re-listen, and dig deeper if they hear something they like!

Themes:
L&D 1 – Lyrics and Voices – words and the people that say them

L&D 2 – Melody – simple, complex, catchy, meandering, instrumental, vocal, melodies!

L&D 3 – Harmony – chords, intervals, vocal/instrumental harmonies, and beyond

L&D 4 – Rhythm & Percussion – on the beat, off the beat, maybe no beat at all

L&D 5 – Form – organization in time; verses, choruses, and everything in between

L&D 6 – Instrumentation, Texture, Timbre – the sound of sounds and those sounds together

L&D 7 – Production & Electronic Music – BEEP (panned right) BOOP (panned left)

L&D 8 – Performing the Details – a killer performance takes anything to the next level

Some albums/artists/songwriters we might pull from this semester!

Sister Rosetta Tharpe

Neutral Milk Hotel - In the Aeroplane Over the Sea

Dolly Parton

Jimi Hendrix

Antônio Carlos Jobim

BLACKPINK

Yaeji

SOPHIE

JPEGMAFIA

Madvillian - Madvilliany

Burial - Untrue

Tirzah

Grouper

FKA Twigs

The Congos - Heart of the Congos

Ramshackle Glory – Live the Dream

Björk

Radiohead

Chipmunks On 16 Speed - Sludgefest

Johnny Cash - Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison

Billie Holiday

Trondheim Jazz Orchestra - In the End His Voice Will be the Sound of Paper (ft Jenny Hval, Kim Meyhr)

Soul Glo - The N---- In Me Is Me

Kanye West

Word of Mouth Chorus - Rivers of Delight: American Folk Hymns from The Sacred Harp

Solange

Donna Summer

Pop Smoke

Yves Tumor

Max Martin

…and whatever you bring to the table!