RELG 393G-001: Religion & Music

M/W/F, 1:30 – 2:20 pm, Room: OGH G10

Instructor: Dr. Alex Snow, [Joseph.Snow@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:Joseph.Snow@mail.wvu.edu)

Office Hours – M/W/F 11:00 am – Noon, Room 252 Stansbury Hall

“If organized religion lost its firm grip and there was a general movement away from institutional faith--and I am speaking in sweeping generalities here--then why is it that religious terminology and imagery remain such pervasive features of Western popular music in the post-1960s period?”[[1]](#footnote-1)

“Music, in short, arouses in us an experience and vibrations of mood that are quite specific in kind.... The resultant complex mood is, as it were, a fabric, in which the general human feelings and emotional states constitute the warp, and the non-rational music-feelings the woof.... The real content of music is not drawn from the ordinary human emotions at all, and...is in no way merely a second language, alongside the usual one, by which these emotions find expression. Musical feeling is rather (like numinous feeling) something ‘wholly other.’”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Course Description The myth of Orpheus articulates what social theorists have known since Plato: music matters. It is uniquely able to move us, to guide the imagination, to evoke memories, and to create spaces within which meaning is made.[[3]](#footnote-3) This class will explore religion through music -- a source of spiritual elation, social cohesion, and empowerment in cultures around the world. The only art form named after a divinity, music has been documented from prehistory to the present age in virtually all known cultures. For many, music is a vehicle for spiritual growth and community empowerment, whether it’s understood as a gift of the gods or simply a practice for achieving mental states conducive to enlightenment. Traditionally, when religious scholars talk about music, it’s as a kind of aesthetic supplement to the important spiritual content of a religion, analogous to stained-glass windows or temple paintings. In contrast, this class will acknowledge the critical role of musical activity in religious life. Music is not incidental in religious practice but a sacred treasure that is central to the growth and sustenance of religions throughout the world. Musical sound is sacred in most religions because it embodies the divine and can be shared by all participants. It endures among diverse communities of people despite theological differences. We will specifically apply such ideas, theories, and methods to the diverse contours and contexts of post-1960s popular music; the relatively new ‘keywords’ within the growing academic field of “sound studies” (e.g. noise, acoustics, music, and silence); and the ways sacred music effects cultural, political, and religious transitions in the contemporary world.

Course Objectives[[4]](#footnote-4)

* To understand what we mean by the nature of “religion & music” and to think more critically about the subject;
* To use the historical contexts of various cultures to think imaginatively about the nature of religion and music as a basic response to and expression of the human condition;
* To become aware of the perspectives, concepts, and theories used within the study of religion & music; and
* To achieve fluency in describing and interpreting contextually diverse manifestations of religion & music, while also developing skills in critical analysis and expression by reading, talking, and writing about religion/music.

Required Texts

1. Gods and Guitars: Seeking the Sacred in Post-1960s Popular Music, Michael J. Gilmour, Baylor University Press, 2009 (G1)
2. Call Me the Seeker: Listening to Religion in Popular Music, Michael J. Gilmour, Bloomsbury, 2005 (G2)
3. Resounding Transcendence: Transitions in Music, Religion, and Ritual, Jeffers Engelhardt & Philip Bohlman, eds., Oxford University Press, 2016 (E)
4. The Lyre of Orpheus: Popular Music, The Sacred, & The Profane, Christopher Partridge, Oxford University Press, 2004 (P)
5. Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists, Kay Larson, Penguin Books, Reprint Edition, 2013 (L)
6. Keywords in Sound, David Novak & Matt Sakakeeny, eds, Duke University Press, 2015 (N)

Schedule of Readings

August

Wednesday 17th First Day of Classes

Friday 19th (G1) Introduction – Spirituality in Post-1960s Lyrics

Monday 22nd (G1) Track 1 – Religion on Record: Popular Music’s Anxiety of Influence

Wednesday 24th (G1) Track 2 – Church in a Guitar Case: Comfort and Compassion in Popular Music

Friday 26th (G1) Track 3 – Outrageous Religion: Sex, Defiance, and Obsession with the Sacred

Monday 29th (G1) Track 4 – Looking beyond the Steeple and Menorah

Wednesday 31st (G1) Track 5 – Fade Out: Stealing from the Sacred and Rewriting Religion

September

Friday 2nd (G2) “Shekhinah as Woman: Kabbalistic References in Dylan’s Infidels,” Daniel Maoz

(G2) “‘I Ain’t Got No Home in This World Anymore’: Protest and Promise in Woody

Guthrie and the Jesus Tradition,” James Knight

Monday 5th No Class – Labor Day Recess

Wednesday 7th (G2) “The Prophet Jeremiah, Aung San Suu Kyi, and U2’s All That You Can’t Leave

Behind: On listening to Bono’s Jeremiad,” Michael J. Gilmour

(G2) “Cosmic Endings: Spirit and Flesh in Bono’s Apocalyptic Imagination, 1980-1983,”

Brian Froese

Friday 9th (G2) “Suffering and Sacrifice in Context: Apocalypticism and Life beyond Les

Miserables,” Karl J. McDaniel

(G2) “Faith, Doubt, and the Imagination: Nick Cave on the Divine-Human Encounter,”

Anna Kessler

Monday 12th (G2) “Metallica and the God That Failed: An Unfinished Tragedy in Three Acts,”

Paul Martens

(G2) “The Nature of His Game: A Textual Analysis of ‘Sympathy for the Devil,’”

Harold Penner

Wednesday 14th (G2) “God, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Vi(t)a Negativa of Nick Cave and P. J. Harvey,”

J. R. C. Cousland

(G2) “‘Pulling Back the Darkness’: Starbound with Jon Anderson,” Randall Holm

Friday 16th (G2) “‘God’s Smiling on You and He’s Frowning Too’: Rap and the Problem of Evil,”

Angela M. Nelson

(G2) “Transcendent Trancer: The Scholar and the Rave,” Tim Olaveson

Monday 19th (G2) “Under the Shadow of the Almighty: Fan Reception of Some Religious Aspects in

the Work and Career of the Irish Popular Musician Sinead O’Connor,”

Andreas Hager

(G2) “Planet Rock: Black Socioreligious Movements and Early 1980s Electro,”

Thomas Nesbit

Wednesday 21st (G2) “Spirituality through the Science of Sound: The DJ as Technoshaman in Rave

Culture,” Melanie Takahashi

(G2) “Jesus, Mama, and the Constraints on Salvific Love in Contemporary Country

Music,” Maxine L. Grossman

Paper/Exam #1

Friday 23rd (E) “Resounding Transcendence--An Introduction,” Philip V. Bohlman and

Jeffers Engelhardt

(N) “Introduction,” David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny

Monday 26th (E) “Ensnare the Thief in the House of the Wind: Negotiating Musical Routes of

Baulness in Bangladesh,” Bertie Kibreah

(N) “Acoustemology,” Steven Feld

Wednesday 28th (E) “Transcending Boundaries: Javanese Wayang Kulit without the Shadows,”

Sarah Weiss

(N) “Acoustics,” Benjamin Steege

Friday 30th (E) “Variations for New Themes: Liturgical Transitions in the Major Buddhist Festivals

in Taiwan,” Pi-Yen Chen

(N) “Body,” Deborah Kapchan

October

Monday 3rd (E) “Voicing the Between in Tunisian Stambeli,” Richard C. Jankowsky

(N) “Deafness,” Mara Mills

Rosh Hashanah (Day of Special Concern)

Wednesday 5th (E) “Sounds Transcendent: Gospel Music and the Negotiation of Proximity in Trinidad,”

Timothy Rommen

(N) “Echo,” Mark M. Smith

Mid-Semester

Friday 7th (E) “New Christian Music in Indonesia: Inculturation in Transition,”

Marzanna Poplawska

(N) “Hearing,” Jonathan Sterne

Monday 10th (E) “Transforming Christian Music, Transforming Social Identity in South India,”

Zoe C. Sherinian

(N) “Image,” John Mowitt

Wednesday 12th (E) “Technology and the Transmission of Oral Tradition in the Contemporary Jewish

Community,” Jeffrey A. Summit

(N) “Language,” David Samuels and Thomas Porcello

Yom Kippur (Day of Special Concern)

Friday 14th (E) “Music, Media, and Message: Transitions in Contemporary American Evangelical

Music,” Stephen A. Marini

(N) “Listening,” Tom Rice

Paper/Exam #2

Monday 17th (E) “Sacred Poetics and Musical Politics in Post-Secular Europe,” Philip V. Bohlman

(N) “Music,” Matt Sakakeeny

Wednesday 19th (E) “Arvo Part and the Idea of a Christian Europe: The Musical Effects and Affects of

Post-Ideological Religion,” Jeffers Engelhardt

(N) “Noise,” David Novak

Friday 21st (E) “Byzantine Blossom: The Monastic Revival of Orthodox Chant at Mount Athos,”

Tore Tvarno Lind

(N) “Phonography,” Patrick Feaster

Monday 24th (N) “Radio,” Daniel Fisher

Wednesday 26th (P) “Introduction”

(N) “Religion,” Charles Hirschkind

Friday 28th (P) “Society and Culture”

(N) “Resonance,” Veit Erlmann

Monday 31st (P) “Emotion and Meaning”

(N) “Silence,” Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier

November

Wednesday 2nd (P) “Transgression”

(N) “Space,” Andrew J. Eisenberg

Friday 4th (P) “Romanticism”

(N) “Synthesis,” Tara Rodgers

Monday 7th (P) “Religion”

(N) “Transduction,” Stefan Helmreich

Wednesday 9th (N) “Voice,” Amanda Weidman

Friday 11th (L) “Prelude,” “D. T. Suzuki,” & “John Cage”

Veteran’s Day (Day of Special Concern)

Birth of Baha’u’llah (Day of Special Concern)

Paper/Exam #3

Monday 14th (L) “Merce Cunningham” & “Four Walls”

Wednesday 16th (L) “Seeking Silence” & “Ego Noise”

Friday 18th (L) “The Mind of the Way” & “Heaven and Earth”

Monday 21st No Class – Fall Recess

Wednesday 23rd No Class – Fall Recess

Friday 25th No Class – Fall Recess

Monday 28th (L) “The Infinity of Being” & “Zero”

Wednesday 30th (L) “Another School” & “Moving Out from Zero”

December

Friday 2nd (L) “Indeterminacy” & “Interpenetration”

Monday 5th (L) “Coda”

Last Day of Class

Friday 9th EXAM #4 (Final Exam, 11a-1pm)

Course Requirements

Readings: In order to truly grasp the purpose of this course, reading is vitally important. Students are expected to complete required readings prior to the class for which they have been assigned.

Participation: Your participation will serve as the foundation for the majority of classroom interactions. Students are strongly encouraged to take an active role in classroom discussions. This class is designed to illicit opinions, debates, etc, thus your participation is paramount to the success of the course.

Conduct: The classroom is designed to be an environment where everyone feels comfortable. Students are expected to act in a professional manner. Specifically, students are required to treat both myself and your peers with empathy and respect. There exists no context where a student should feel unsafe or fearful within the confines of my classroom. Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated.

Cell Phones and Electronic Devices: In order to limit classroom disruptions, as well as protect against academic misconduct, the use of cell phones, messaging devices and any other non-authorized electronic devices is prohibited in the classroom.

Notes: You are responsible for taking your own notes. I will not provide copies of my notes, nor will the notes be posted online (unless my lecture includes a great deal of material that cannot be found in the course readings). Please do not ask me to provide you with missed notes – please contact another class member to acquire any missed work.

Course Evaluation

You are encouraged to begin working on the take-home exams as early as possible and you are strongly encouraged to meet with me to discuss a first draft of your papers. Sign-up sheets will be available on my office door for meetings to provide you with feedback and opportunities to improve your work before submitting it to be graded. Please also consider using the Eberly Writing Studio at <http://speakwrite.wvu.edu/writing-studio>

Grading: Final grades will be based on 4 In-Class and/or Take-Home Exams (each worth 25% of the final grade). These will be designed to reflect material discussed in both lectures and reading—so it is to your advantage to familiarize yourself with all the class material. These exams consist of short answer and essay type questions. Since these exams are take-home/open-book type, the nature of the questions will be more analytical. They seek to assess your ability to survey and integrate various concepts rather than just reproduce the information in your books. I will give you specific guidelines whenever I release those exams to you. The criteria below will be used when grading:

1) Clarity: The viewpoints you present in your writing must be clearly conceived and well argued. Your writing style should be straight-forward, easy to read and should be clearly related to the issues you wish to address. Topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph are helpful in establishing the issue and argument for the reader at the outset.

2) Engagement with the material: Responses are to be related to the reading material. They are not “reviews” of what has been stated in the book, but are your critical analyses of the reading—seriously taking-up what you consider to be the ‘key’ issues for the study of religion in the reading. An analysis of the issues discussed in the course become clearer the closer your writing is to the texts used in class.

3) Creativity: The ‘work’ of Religious Studies, and perhaps the Humanities in general, is essentially creative. Interpretation of religious phenomena requires that you come to some meaningful relationship with your object of study. This is one of the defining characteristics of creativity. You have a unique and important contribution to make to our collective understandings. There are no predetermined experts in the area of interpretation, only well refined and well argued positions. Your interpretations will be dealt with as importantly as you regard them yourself.

I will provide feedback to the class as a whole to note strengths to maintain and trouble spots to avoid as you continue to improve your abilities to explain and apply key course concepts. Knowledge is cumulative. Understanding your strengths and challenges will help you do better as you continue to articulate what you know. You are also welcome to meet during office hours or by appointment for additional feedback.

Attendance, Quizzes, and Class Participation: Attendance is mandatory for full comprehension of this course. Lectures and reading will be intimately related to each other but oftentimes quite different. It is therefore in your own best interest to do the reading and attend class, as both will reflect in your performance on the Quizzes and Exams. You will be given regular opportunities to participate in class by asking questions, making comments, and interacting with other students during discussions. Also, attendance could influence your performance in the exams; especially, since there will be information in the lectures that you will not find in your textbooks. Besides the material from textbooks, everything else covered in class including lectures, power point slides, discussions, videos, information written on chalk board, etc., can potentially be on the exams. You are expected to attend the class on time and stay until the end of the class; coming in and going out during the class is rude, disruptive, and distracting to other students as well as me. If there are any exceptional circumstances to be considered please let me know before the class starts. The Student Instruction Committee of the Faculty Senate with the support of the Office of the Provost recommends the following social justice statement:

“Students who will miss an examination or a field trip due to a Day of Special Concern absence should notify their instructors at the beginning of the term. Faculty are instructed to make reasonable accommodation for students who miss scheduled exams or field trips as a result of such observance.”

Make-Up Exam Policy: There will be very few opportunities for make-up examinations. All University sanctioned absences will be allowed but under the following circumstances, it is your responsibility to notify me in person of your absence prior to the actual absence. As for other absences, if you are ill on the day of an examination, it is your responsibility to notify me prior to the absence. If you fail to notify me within the actual class window, then I will assume that you just failed to attend.

Final Grades will be determined as follows: Exam #1 100 points

Exam #2 100 points

Exam #3 100 points

Exam #4 100 points

400 points Total

Course Grading Scale:

A — 360-400 pts.

B — 320-359 pts.

C — 280-319 pts.

D — 240-279 pts.

F — 239 points and below

**Grades for Exams:**

* An **A paper** is an outstanding essay which reflects a perceptive and thoughtful response to the assignment. It is well-organized with excellent development of its ideas and reflects the writer’s command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of American prose.
* A **B paper** is a very good essay that fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. It is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics of writing which do not interfere with reading the essay.
* A **C paper** is a satisfactory essay which fulfills the assignment and is adequately developed. The writing is clear and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish an above-average essay.
* A **D paper** is a below-average essay which fulfills the assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. It may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.
* An **F paper** is an essay that relates to the topic but is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. It fails to present its basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard American usage. Such an essay may have sentence boundary problems, poor use of idiom, inappropriate diction (words used incorrectly), agreement errors, or verb tense problems. An essay that represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing which are clearly not the student’s own work, will receive a grade of F. Please refer to 5 the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the WVU policy on Academic Dishonesty or see the WVU Student Conduct Code at <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_> student\_conduct/student\_conduct\_code. Attend

Academic Integrity: Dishonesty and/or plagiarism are serious offenses. Clear cases will result in appropriate academic discipline and an unforgivable “F” may be given for the entire course. Please see the following: <http://eberly.wvu.edu/current_students/advising_resources/avoiding_plagiarism>. I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing actions, please see the students conduct code at [University Student Conduct Code, Policy Bulletin 31](http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code), or <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code>. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Contact/E-mail Policy: All emails should include your full name, course number, and section (these can all be in your “signature”); If you are including an assignment or other time-sensitive material, do not assume that I received it until I respond (if something is sent and doesn’t come through on time, you will need to forward the already-sent mail); You must turn in a hard copy of any assignment sent by email, unless I’ve specifically said otherwise; I will usually respond to emails within a few hours during the week, but if you email me at night/on weekends I may not respond until the next morning/weekday; Please follow normal rules of grammar, including spell-checking your emails—in general: remember that your emails contribute to people’s impression of you and of your work!

Inclusivity Statement

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Adverse Weather Commitment Statement

In the event of inclement or threatening weather, everyone should use his or her best judgment regarding travel to and from campus. Safety should be the main concern. If you cannot get to class because of adverse weather conditions, you should contact me as soon as possible. Similarly, if I am unable to reach our class location, I will notify you of any cancellation or change as soon as possible (at least 1 hour before class starts), using MIX/Gmail to prevent you from embarking on any unnecessary travel. If you cannot get to class because of weather conditions, I will make allowances relative to required attendance policies, as well as any scheduled tests, quizzes, or other assessments.

Changes in the Course Syllabus

The instructor has the right to make changes in the syllabus throughout the semester as deemed necessary and appropriate. I will let you know of any such changes.

Student Services

I am always available to discuss students' concerns and progress during individual appointments. As well, WVU has the following services for students needing additional assistance:

WELLWVU Students Center of Health WVU Writing Center

<http://www.wvu.edu/~cocenter/> [http://english.wvu.edu/centers-projects/writing-center](https://email.uoit.ca/owa/redir.aspx?C=KPML8omIY0yhOx6qmtZbqrtrVGrcytBIuES4IgJrWQu7V72BBbWvMAxAr_TADffR-7FqO3uK8Uw.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fenglish.wvu.edu%2fcenters-projects%2fwriting-center)

WVU Student Support Services/TRIO Office of Student Life

<http://sss.wvu.edu>/ <http://www.studentlife.wvu.edu>

Course Description from WVU Undergraduate Catalog: RELG 230 - Religions of India. 3 Hours. Proto-Indian religion, Hinduism, beginnings of Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism; historical and theological foundations; developments of thought; and contemporary expressions and encounters with the modern world.

Please check out the Following Websites:

* WVU Program for Religious Studies – <http://religiousstudies.wvu.edu/>
* WVU Religious Studies Club on Facebook – <http://www.facebook.com/groups/268696159888365/>
* WVU Religious Studies and Study Abroad on Facebook – <http://www.facebook.com/groups/133862393434286/>

1. Michael Gilmour, Gods and Guitars, 2009, xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 1923, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Borrowed from back cover of Christopher Partridge’s The Lyre of Orpheus. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In order to participate with these positions in a more reflective way, we'll attempt to keep two important perspectives in mind: Imaginative sympathy—Please take seriously the worlds of peoples involved, assume that religious thoughts and/or practices carry real meaning for any person or group under consideration; and Critical distance—Try to raise questions that may not be raised by the participants, such as, what effect does this faith/practice have on the participant? On society? What kinds of values does a given text suggest or implicitly depend upon? What are the conceptions of human nature that texts and practices envision? What does a given dimension of any tradition show to be fundamental to human happiness and welfare? [↑](#footnote-ref-4)