

MSC IND 112A - Introduction to Songwriting

Instructor: Amy Kuney (She/Her)

Class Location: SMB 1354

Class Hours: Tuesdays 11 am-1:50 pm

Course Overview:

In this class, students will learn the basic skills to write a full song. We will explore rhythm, rhyme scheme, melody, and lyric as well as the joys of co-writing and pitching songs to other artists. We will explore some songwriting's history and the 'magic' that makes a good song *great*. By the end of this class, students will be able to write a song and identify the components of a song. The final for this course is a complete, original song submitted by each student.

***Song Submissions will be accepted through BruinLearn as: mp3, mp4, wav files OR live performance for class.**

Final Original Song:

- May be written in collaboration with classmates.
- Must consist of (at least): two *lyrically* different verses and one chorus.
- May not be written over a 'ready-made' track (YouTube, Soundcloud, etc.)
- Any samples included in the original song must be royalty-free (Splice, etc.)
- Lyrics must be submitted with the song.

Required Text:

*All required texts will be provided in PDF format in BruinLearn.

Required Course Materials

1. Personal Notebook(s) and Pen or Pencil

2. Personal Headphones, Earbuds, or air pods
3. Access to Music Streaming Services (i.e., Spotify, Amazon, etc.)
4. Metronome App on Phone or Laptop

Grading: (letter grade)

- Class participation: 20%
- In-class assignments: 20%
- Song analysis (multiple): 10%
- Song collaboration: 20%
- Final Song Presentation: 30%

All in-class assignments are expected to be submitted by the end of class through BruinLearn regardless of complete/incomplete. Submissions will be graded as submitted/not submitted.

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## Week 1: Song Concept

\*During the first class, students can share their original songs by performing live or recording! Please email all links and/or files to me beforehand: amykune85@g.ucla.edu

### In class, we will cover:

- The difference between song concept and song title.
- 'Sticking to the plot' -keeping lyrics consistent with the concept.
- Creating a 'scene' through lyrics.
- Character building, conflict, and resolution in a song.

### In-class assignments:

- Morning Pages and brainstorming.
- Letter Writing/finding 'personal vocabulary'.
- Webbing to expand on the concept.

**Readings for the week:** (All PDFs can be found in modules.)

1. Pp. 70-124 (Part II Enchantment) *Big Magic* by Elisabeth Gilbert.
2. Leonard Cohen: *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo link: <https://www.leonardcohenfiles.com/zollo.html>
3. Pp. 12-55 *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield

**Homework:** Analyze the song of your choice and submit an analysis through BruinLearn. Students may present their analysis in the next class!

## Week 2: Figures of Speech

### In class, we will cover:

- The use of figures of speech in lyric writing
- Showing vs. telling (Ex. Frank Ocean's "Thinkin' bout You.)
- The art of re-writing lyrics to be more descriptive
- Personification
- Avoiding cliches

### In-class, assignments:

- Re-write given phrases using figures of speech.
- Choose another artist's song demonstrating one or more of the techniques we discussed in class. Describe, in 500 words or more, how the artist achieved "Showing vs. Telling" through the lyrics. Submit through Bruin Learn.
- Collaboration on song title with a classmate(s)

### Readings for the week: (All PDFs can be found in modules.)

1. Paul Simon: *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo (Pp. 87-122)
2. Pp. 55-95 *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield
3. *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron "The Basic Tools" and Week 1: Recovering a Sense of Safety

### Homework:

Continue working with collaborator(s) on the given song title **(Due Nov.7 at class time)**

## Week 3. Rhyming

## In class, we will cover:

- Rhyme schemes including but not limited to AABB, ABAB, ABCB
- Types of Rhymes, (perfect, slanted, etc.)
- The 'highlighter method'
- How to rhyme multi-syllabic words or, 'multi's'

## In-class, assignments:

- Writing lines to rhyme with given lyrics.
- Using the 'highlighter' method, pick an artist's song of your choice, download the lyrics and color code the different types of rhyme schemes throughout the song (Be Thorough!) Submit through BruinLearn.

Color code:

- Blue for internal
- Red for multi
- Pink for Perfect
- Green for slant
- Yellow for holorhyme

## Readings for the week: (All PDFs can be found in modules.)

1. Patti Smith: *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo
2. Pp: 96-143 *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield
3. *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron Week 2: Recovering a Sense of Identity

## Homework:

1. Continue working with collaborators on your original song.
2. Analyze the song of your choice and submit an analysis through BruinLearn. Students may present their analysis in the next class!

## Week 4: Song structure and chord progressions

### In class, we will cover:

- Song structure.
- The difference between verses, choruses, bridges, and pre-choruses.
- The anti-chorus.
- The most common chord progression(s)

### Readings for the week:

1. Pp: 144-158 *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield
2. *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron Week 3: Recovering a Sense of Power
4. Herbie Hancock: *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo

### Homework:

1. Continue working with collaborators on your original song.
2. Analyze the song of your choice and submit an analysis through BruinLearn. Students may present their analysis in the next class!

## Week 5: Melody

### In class, we will cover:

- The 'numbers system' and starting a melody on each note of a scale.
- How to write a hook and a motif
- Other artists' melodies within their vocal ranges
- 'Busy' melodies vs. 'spacious'
- Conversational melodies

### Readings for the week: (All PDFs can be found in modules.)

1. Chapter 1 Ari Herstand: How to Make it in the New Music Business
2. Chapters 3-4 Ari Herstand: How to Make it in the New Music Business
3. *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron Week 4: Recovering a Sense of Integrity

### Homework:

1. Continue working with collaborators on your original

## Week 6: Collaborating, and the Artist Pitch

**Collaborations are due by 11:00 a.m. These can be presented in class through live performance or mp3/m4a/.wav**

### In class, we will cover:

- The Role of A&R
- The "Who's Looking" list.
- Artist Pitch

### In-class, assignments:

Artist pitch exercise (see modules)

### Readings:

1. *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron Week 5: Recovering a Sense of Possibility
2. Woody Guthrie *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo
3. Chapter 7 (Collaboration) *How Music Works* by David Byrne

### Homework:

1. Begin working on the FINAL original song either alone or with collaborators!

## Week 7: Writing to Samples, Beats, and Found Sounds.

### In class, we will cover:

- Using Splice to get inspired.
- Sampling
- Using found sounds to build tracks.
- Time Signature, BPM, and simple rhythm

### In-class, assignments:

Make a beat using found sounds! In groups of 3-4, students will use iPhones to record found sounds around campus (e.g., Slamming doors, vocalists rehearsing, chairs scraping the floor, etc.) These voice memos will be airdropped into the DAW system of choice and used to create a beat. Tracks will be presented at the end of class! **Submitting to BruinLearn is optional for this exercise.**

### Readings:

1. *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron Week 6: Recovering a Sense of Abundance
2. Kenny Gamble: *Songwriters on Songwriting* by Paul Zollo

### Homework:

Continue working on your final original song either alone or with collaborators

## Week 8: – More Melody and pitching for Sync.

### In class, we will cover:

- What makes a melody sad, hopeful, angry, conversation, or happy?
- Max Martin's melodic math
- The use of repetition and the 'mere' effect.
- The process of pitching songs to film and Television
- The role of a music supervisor

### Readings:

1. *The Artists Way* by Julia Cameron Week 6: Recovering a Sense of Connection
2. *Sync 101* (PDF in modules)

### Homework:

Continue working on your final original song either alone or with collaborators

## Week 9: (11.28-12.5) Final Performances, Publishing, and self-release



The final song is due by 11:00 a.m. **All** students must present a song in the class by live performance or playback (mp3, m4a, .wav)

### In class, we will cover:

- Distribution services including, but not limited to Distrokid, TuneCore, and CD Baby.
- PROs including but not limited to ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC
- The difference between publishing and sound recording
- Four main types of royalties
- The importance of crediting collaborators

homework: Put finishing touches on final songs!

## Week 10: Final Song Performances!