

HACU 205: American Strings: Old Time and Bluegrass
Fall, 2015
Prof. Becky Miller

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Office: ASH 208

T, TH 2 – 3:20, Music Recital Hall
Monday night (occasional) film screenings in ASH Auditorium or music sessions (Music Recital Hall): 7:30 to 8:45 pm.

TA: XXX

Most reading and listening as well as an updated syllabus can be found on Moodle. You should check Moodle several times/week and always check your Hampshire email account several times/day.

This course focuses on American southern old-time string band music, bluegrass, and early country song. We will draw on cultural theory to explore the growth of these musics throughout the 20th century as well as the influences of African-American musical expression, class, gender, and music revivalism. We will consider old time and bluegrass both from an historical perspective and ethnographically as vital forms in communities today. The course will include weekly reading/listening assignments, occasional film screenings, an off campus fieldwork/community project, written assignments based on the reading, and two 4-5 page essays, one of which is an ethnography of a bluegrass music session.

While this course is primarily academic, there will also be a performance component: students will learn to play old time music by ear and develop a repertoire of traditional dance music. Prior experience with old time music is not necessary, but a basic knowledge of one of the following acoustic instruments is required: fiddle (violin), banjo, guitar, upright bass, mandolin, harmonica, ukulele, other appropriate instruments, or permission of instructor. The Music Program has a banjo that students can borrow; please see me if you are interested.

Attendance/Late Policy

Students are allowed a total of three (**3**) class absences. After the third absence, I will email you a warning; any subsequent absence will result in no evaluation (failure for Five College Students) for the course. **Lateness counts as an absence**, so please note that I expect you to be in your seat and ready to start at **2:00 pm**. Finally, the following classes are **mandatory**: any class or concert that features a special **guest** artist; one of the two Friday auditions (**9/11, 11-12:30 or 2:00 to 3:30 pm**), the class before Thanksgiving break (**11/24**) and the final class (dress rehearsal/sound check for concert). Attendance will also be taken for all Wednesday evening film screenings.

I do not allow cell phones or laptops in class. Leave your cell phone and laptop in your dorm or in your bag, turned off. If you are texting or working on your laptop, I will ask you to leave the class.

Reading and Writing Assignments

Most class meetings have reading assignments attached to them, all of which are mandatory. Please do the reading carefully, be prepared to discuss them in class, and be sure to bring a copy of each assignment to class as we often will work directly from the text, sometimes in small groups. Regular, energized participation in class discussion and learning/playing music is also required. Your evaluation (or your grade if you are a Five College student) will take your class participation and preparation strongly into account.

Written assignments as well as the mid-term essay are all mandatory and must address the reading assignments. They are due, in class, on the indicated day. I generally do not accept late papers; please talk to me if there's a good reason for handing one in late. Your written work should be well written, critical, and analytical and they must substantively address the prompts on the Moodle page. These are NOT opinion papers.

All written work for the class should be **typed, double spaced**, using 11 or 12 pitch fonts, 1 inch margins, and only **black ink**. Write clearly, formally, and avoid the first person "I." You are required to use in-text citations of sources and include a complete bibliography/discography. Please see me if you are unclear about correct citation of sources or if you are unclear as to what constitutes plagiarism. I do not accept emailed papers.

Performance

You should be prepared to play when we have scheduled a music session; please check the course webpage regularly to see when to bring your instrument to class. If you forget your instrument and come late to class, it will count as one of your three allowed absences. About half way through the semester, we will divide into bands and play together until the end of the semester. This will require making yourself available for rehearsals outside of class time with the members of your group. Please do not take this course if you think that you will not be able to find the extra time outside of class to rehearse with your band.

For repertoire ideas, check out the forum on Moodle. Also, feel free to upload tunes or songs in the old time or bluegrass style that you think your classmates might like. Aim for learning new repertoire whenever possible. At the end of the semester, there will be a formal student concert featuring your bands with full sound system, lighting, and sound engineer. Participation in this concert is mandatory; it will take place on **Thursday, December 10th** evening in the Music Recital Hall.

Required Texts, available at Amherst Books, 8 Main Street, Amherst
413.256.1547 www.amherstbooks.com

- 1) Goldsmith, Thomas, ed. *The Bluegrass Reader*. Urbana, IL: University of IL Press.
- 2) All other reading is located on the course webpage. **You are required to print out all reading from the webpage and bring them to class.** If you use a different email address your college email, it is your responsibility to have your messages forwarded and/or check your college email account daily.

Bluegrass Music Session:

Every Wednesday night from 6:00 – 8:00 pm at the Black Sheep on Main Street in Amherst. Plan to initially go as an observer rather than as a participant, particularly if you are new to old time and/or bluegrass music. If you'd like to join in later on in the semester, please observe **session etiquette** (we'll talk further about this in class).

The Black Sheep bluegrass session is where you'll go to conduct participant observation fieldwork for your final paper (an ethnography of a bluegrass music session). Plan on attending the session at least twice in the semester. You can catch a bus from Hampshire to the center of Amherst; if you need or can offer a ride, please post this on the Forum on the Moodle Page.

Class Schedule (Subject to Change; full listing of assignments and downloadable readings are found on Moodle.

September 10th, Thursday: Welcome and Introduction

September 11th, Friday: 11:00 – 12:30 or 2:00 to 3:30 pm, Music Recital Hall: Music Session/Relaxed, painfree but mandatory audition.

Bring your instruments; guitarists and mandolin players must have a flatpick. Listen to the two versions of “Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss” on the Moodle page before the audition and familiarize yourself with it. You do not need to learn it; just listen to it.

Tuesday, 9/15: Roots of Old Time, Part I: Anglo/Irish Influence

Due: 2-page paper based on the reading assignments due in class (see Moodle page for prompt).

Reading and Listening Assignments: Malone, Wolf, Jamison, and others as indicated on Moodle.

Wednesday, 9/16: Film Screening, *Louie Bluie* and *Sprout Wings and Fly*

Thursday, 9/17: Old Time Music Session (bring instruments)

Guitarists **MUST** bring a flatpick (you cannot participate without one).

Listening: “Waterbound”

Browse: website on the Library of Congress’ Henry Reed Collection.

Tuesday, 9/22: Roots of Old Time, Part II: African-American Influence.

DUE: 2 page paper based on reading assignments due in class (see Moodle for details).

Reading: Wells, Conway, Jamison, and Hay articles

Listening: Thompson brothers, Georgia Yellow Hammers, others.

Thursday, 9/24: Music Session (bring instruments, recording gear); listen to designated tunes on Moodle in preparation.

Tuesday, 9/29: Old Time Country Song: Jean Ritchie and Hazel Dickens

Reading: Excerpts from Jean Ritchie's biography (on Moodle), Harrington (on Hazel Dickens) in *Bluegrass Reader*.

Listening: various ballads/songs performed by Jean Ritchie, Hazel Dickens

Paper due: You are a host of *Fresh Ear*, a highly regarded public radio program that features interviews with well-known traditional artists. You are interviewing Jean Ritchie and Hazel Dickens. Write a **two to three** page Q&A interview that interrogates their experiences, aesthetics, and the issues that confronted them as performing artists. Post this to the appropriate Forum on Moodle. Read through five of your classmates' interviews and comment on their work. Please select interviews that have not already been highly commented on, so that everybody gets feedback. **Please** bring in to class hard copy to hand in.

Wednesday, 9/30: Film Screening, 7:00 pm, ASH Auditorium: "Awake My Soul: The Story of the Sacred Harp"

Thursday, 10/1: Roots of Old Time Song: Shape Note Singing School. **Special Guests:** Tim Eriksen and members of Northampton's Shape Note Singing community

Reading: Pen, Sommers.

Listening: Selections from sacred harp singing (Alabama and Northampton)

Tuesday, 10/6: Intersections of Race and Class, Part I: The Carter Family and Leslie Riddle

Reading: Bill Malone; Barry O'Connell

Listening: selections from recordings by Leslie Riddle, and the Carter Family.

Thursday, 10/8: Special Guest OR Music Session (tbd)

Tuesday, 10/13: No Class: Fall Break

Wednesday, 10/14, 7:00 pm: Film screening: *Harlan County, USA* (ASH Auditorium)

Reading: Goodell, "Black Gold or Death?" (*New York Times* editorial)

Thursday, 10/15: Intersections of Race and Class, Part II: Jimmie Rodgers

Reading: Peterson; other readings TBD.

2-3 Page Paper Due in class: If the members of the Carter Family, Leslie Riddle, and Jimmie Rodgers sat down and had a conversation about race and old time music, what would they talk about? What would they ask each other? What would they say to each other? Write a two to three page conversation and refer

whenever possible to the readings from the last few classes, including the reading for today. Include a bibliography. Due at the beginning of class.

Tuesday, 10/20: Old Time Music and The Great Depression: The Coon Creek Girls and Charlie Poole

Assignment: Write up three questions based on the reading. These questions should focus on issues of gender, class, and what Lily May Ledford writes about and what she only implies. Print them out and bring them in to class to hand in. Be prepared to lead discussion on your questions.

Reading: Lily May Ledford, *Coon Creek Girl* (1980)

Listening: selections from the Coon Creek Girls; Charlie Poole

Thursday, 10/22: Music Session

Tuesday, 10/27: Intersections of Race and Tradition, Part III: Dock Boggs, "Doc" Carter, and Doc Watson.

Listening: Doc Watson, Dock Boggs

Reading: Lightfoot, O'Connell

Short written assignment due.

Wednesday, 10/28: Film: "High Lonesome: The Story of Bluegrass Music," (Rachel Lieblich), 7:00 pm, Ash Auditorium

Thursday, 10/29: Roots of Country Song: Brother Duets/Introduction to Country Harmony Singing

Reading: Cantwell (chapter 1); Rosenberg, pages 28-39.

Listening: The Monroe Brothers, and others.

Tuesday, 11/3: Bill Monroe and The Roots of Bluegrass

Reading: Pearson, pp 23-52; Cantwell, Chapter 2; Rooney, pgs. 21-101.

Listening: Bill Monroe and The Bluegrass Boys (various eras.)

Thursday, 11/5: No Class, Advising Day

Midterm Paper due in Becky's crate outside her office by noon: Five (5) page essay: Is there really such a thing as the "authentic?" Who defines it and how? Discuss this as it relates to old time music and country song. Drawing from the reading assignments and from the presentations by visiting guests to date, discuss the various perspectives on the notion of authenticity. For example, how did the early Appalachian scholars and performers define authenticity? Why? Likewise, how did members of the early hillbilly music industry define it and towards what ends? How did hillbilly musicians see themselves? How does contemporary sacred harp singing work into this? Then, offer your opinion at the end of this essay: is the notion of authenticity valid? Why or why not? Who is defining what for whom? And to what end?

Cite your sources and include a bibliography. You will be evaluated on the quality of your writing, how you work with your research, e.g. sources, and the coherence with which you put together your argument. I am not looking for any one particular answer; I am asking you to think critically and defend your stance. Spelling, punctuation, and correct grammar are important and will also be taken into account. Please proofread your work. Double spaced, typed and staple your paper.

Tuesday, 11/10: 1940s and 1950s Bluegrass: Flatt and Scruggs, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, The Stanley Brothers

Reading: Wright/Stanley, pp. 44-73; Gates, 327-337; Stuart, 51-53.

Listening: Flatt and Scruggs, Stanley Brothers, Kenny Baker, others tba.

Due: Concert Tune/Song Annotation: In your band, come up with a list of four or five potential tunes and/or songs that you may perform in the final concert. Each student then takes responsibility for researching one of the songs/tunes (origins, style, etc.) as well as a short description of genre/theme, etc. Bring this list to class as well as who will research which piece.

Thursday, 11/12: Music Session: Tunes of the Skillet Lickers -- “Rock That Cradle Lucy,” “Brokendown Gambler,” “Devlish Mary,” recorded ca. 1928.

Tuesday, 11/17: Bluegrass from 1960 - 1980 (Osborne Brothers, Jim and Jesse McReynolds, Don Reno, and others)

Reading: Wernick, Artis, Rosenberg (pp. 68-90), Harrington, Hunter Thompson.

Listening: Don Reno, Osborne Bros., Byron Berline, Dan Crary, Frank Wakefield and the Good Ol Boys.

Thursday, 11/19: Special Guest: Chris Brashear, bluegrass fiddler, guitarist, songwriter.

Thursday evening, 7:00 pm: Chris Brashear and Ben Demerath in concert, MRH, attendance mandatory; bring your friends!

Tuesday, 11/24: Newgrass and Beyond

Thursday, 11/26: No Class: Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday, December 1st: Women in Bluegrass

Reading: Bufwack, Mary A. “Girls with Guitars – and Fringe and Sequins and Rhinestones, Silk, Lace, and Leather;” Oermann and Bufwack, “Little Darlin’s Not My Name; **short articles by** Wernick, Sawyer, Macnie, Ratliff, Adler, and Henry.

Listening: Patsy Montana, Olabelle Reed, Allison Krause and Union Station, Rhonda Vincent, and others.

2 page response paper due: Discuss the main points regarding the role of women in bluegrass. Cite specific arguments made in each article. Where do they differ in their views? Where do they seem to agree? Cite your sources and include a bibliography.

Wednesday, 12/2: Film: "Dixie Chicks: Shut Up and Sing!" 7:00 pm, ASH Auditorium

Thursday, December 3rd: Band Coaching

Tuesday, 12/8: Old Time Music Revival (1970s-present)

Reading: Carter, Henry Reed website, Malone

Listening: "The Bible's True" (Uncle Dave Macon tune, as performed by the Lazy Aces String Band), Highwoods String Band, The Agents of Tara, others.

Due: Two page paper that focuses on the central arguments presented in Carter and Malone's respective take on the old time music revival, taking into account the difference of era.

Thursday, 12/10: Dress Rehearsal and Concert!

5:00 to 6:00 pm: Mandatory sound check/staging with Larry Berger.

7:00 pm call for all musicians; concert begins at 7:30 pm. Bring your family and friends!

Monday, 12/14: Final Portfolio Due and 5 page ethnographic report of Black Sheep Session due (include it in the portfolio). Becky's gray crate outside her office (ASH 208).