Songwriters Forum
MPATC-GE 2090/MPATC-UE 1090
Thursdays, 3:00-4:40; Room 611 (Dolan Studio Conference Room)
Spring 2019
INSTRUCTOR: Phil Galdston (phil.galdston@nyu.edu) Office hours: By appointment.

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus may be revised from time-to-time. Revisions will be posted on NYU Classes with announcement of the posting.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: To help students advance the art and craft of their songwriting in a stimulating, nurturing, creative, and productive environment.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: Students will:
• develop an understanding of tools used to create some of the best-known and highly-respected songs in various genres;
• make and demonstrate diligent effort to apply this knowledge to their own work;
• explore the collaborative process;
• expand their creative horizons, when possible, venturing outside their comfort zone;
• learn to better analyze and assess the work of others, as well as their own;
• better distinguish between songs and recordings/performances;
• discuss topics of interest and value to those contemplating a life in music.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
1- For each class, please post on Google Drive or be prepared to perform any of your music and lyrics in written or recorded form that you wish to have aired and discussed. (Please see notes, below for appropriate presentation format.) Incomplete songs/recordings are always welcome. The quality of the presentation is totally irrelevant.

2- By the time each class begins, you should have posted on Google Drive or bring to class pdfs or Word docs of your lyrics, regardless of the stage, and, at minimum, a rudimentary chord chart (please see—and take very seriously—the TECHNICAL NOTES).

3- Please remember that songs at any stage of development may always be performed live. An excellent keyboard and acoustic guitar are available. Please feel free to bring your own guitar or any other instrument you play. While live performances are welcome, students may gain greater perspective by listening to a recording along with your fellow students.

4- An important element in this course is a bright line between a song and its recording. Most people—even experienced songwriters—conflate the two. For example, when asked to describe the appeal of a song, many will list arrangement elements (like guitar or backing vocal parts), or production elements (like echo or compression). While these can be crucial — even, essential — to a song’s success, they are almost always elements of presentation. To help you begin to distinguish between the song and the record, please see TOOLS FOR THE MASSES, a template
for song analysis posted on Classes.

5- The focus of our class discussions will be on work created during the term. There may be opportunity to review work created outside the course.

6- Please bring to the course an open mind and an open heart.

7- Unless expressly stated and acknowledged otherwise, all suggestions offered by students and faculty become the property of the student whose work is the subject of those suggestions.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

1- The assignments in this course are designed to stretch your talents, develop your skills, and help you to expand your horizons. This includes a willingness to explore collaboration with your fellow students.

2- During the term, students are required to complete, or make observable effort towards completing, between eight and ten songwriting assignments. Generally, the first three assignments will be created in assigned collaborative groups I assign. How the balance of the assignments is created will be a matter of for discussion, but students will have ample opportunity to work on their own or in collaborations of their choosing.

3- Each assignment will be accompanied by notable examples of songs that address it. Students are required to listen to those songs and to be prepared to discuss them in class.

4- Brief prose assignments focused on peer review may be assigned.

5- Each student’s rate of progress towards completing the assignments may vary. The key is to demonstrate that you are intently working on them. One way to do this is to play songs in varying degrees of completion.

6- Almost all songwriters at some point experience some degree of writer’s block and/or find it difficult to write to assignment. Should you be unable to make significant progress on an assignment, you’re required to let me know. If you should be unable to complete an assignment, you’ll be required to write a 2-page analysis of one of the examples provided for that assignment. (Papers should be in Word format, in 12-point font, with 1.5 spacing. Your name, the assignment number, and the title and writers of the song must appear at the top of your paper.)

5- Please keep in mind that the vast majority of work (i.e. songwriting) in the course takes place outside the classroom.

**CLASSROOM LISTENING/FEEDBACK:** Please note that, of necessity, this is a more flexible class than many in which you have enrolled. We'll play and discuss as many of your songs as possible, but we may not always have time to play all the songs you write or wish to share. Listening to and discussing the songs of others can have great benefit, and it’s my experience that going deeper is better for all than going faster. By term’s end, or as soon as possible, thereafter, I will provide feedback for all songs submitted.
CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE
• Students are expected to refrain at all times from texting, use of social media, and all computer activities unrelated to classroom work. Such use is disrespectful to your peers and our process.

• Listening closely to the work of your peers is crucial to helping them and you learn more about songwriting.

• Opinions—even strong opinions—are not only welcome, they’re essential. As long as they’re offered in a constructive, polite way, all of us can benefit from a free exchange of them.

ATTENDANCE
• Students are expected to attend all classes, arrive on time, and stay until the end of the class.

• One unexcused absence per term is permitted; all others will require a doctor’s note or other satisfactory explanation.

• Unexcused absences beyond one will affect grades.

• Regardless of the reason for an absence, you are responsible for any missed work and any assignments issued.

HONOR CODE
By enrolling in this course, you acknowledge and agree that the songs you submit, whether complete or partial, are your creations, written specifically for this course. It is perfectly acceptable to develop an idea you have begun, previously, or to significantly revise a previously completed song. However, if you do, it is your responsibility to inform faculty.

READING
Please purchase a copy of Songwriters on Songwriting, by Paul Zollo (available from amazon.com and elsewhere), and read as many of the interviews as possible. Among those I would highlight are: Leonard Cohen, Paul Simon, Randy Newman, Alannis Morissette, Burt Bacharach/Hal David, and Lamont Dozier.

You are urged to purchase a good rhyming dictionary. While many of you may search online for rhymes, my experience is that most songwriters find that a physical book is a far superior resource. Although I use a few, I recommend: Wood, Clement, The Complete Rhyming Dictionary: Including The Poet's Craft Book. I have employed both the unabridged and the abridged, but tend to find the latter a little more productive.

UPLOADING YOUR WORK: You will upload your work to a personalized folder per assignment on Google Drive. Instructions will be provided. Please carefully read the course’s technical notes (posted @ NYU Classes). It is crucial that you follow them in every detail. The responsibility to upload your labeled properly work on time and in the acceptable format is entirely yours.
GRADES
Your grade in this course will be based on your effort (not your talent) and your class participation. To be clear, your grade is not based on the quality or artistry of your end product, but, rather, on your diligent work towards the stated course goals.

Effort is indicated by: sincere attempts to fulfill the assignments; a willingness to stretch beyond your comfort zone (writing in genres or moods in which you do not typically write); timeliness of completion of assignments or, when that is not possible, notification of your attempts to do so; and posting of correctly-labeled audio files, lyrics, and charts. PLEASE NOTE: songs you write outside of assignments are welcome, but will not be reflected in your grade.

Participation includes attentive listening, constructive comments, insightful suggestions, and pertinent questions. Students who do not volunteer opinions will, from time-to-time, be called upon to do so.

GRADE BREAKDOWN
70%: EFFORT (including response to songwriting assignments)
20%: ASSIGNMENT COMPLETION
10%: CLASS PARTICIPATION

PLEASE SEND TO ME via email your academic schedule for this term.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Please be sure to check your email for announcements via NYU Classes. It is your responsibility to do so. There is no way for faculty to text all students.

If, at any time, you have any questions or comments about this syllabus, the TECHNICAL NOTES, the grading criteria, the course, or anything else to do with songwriting, please do not hesitate to contact me. I consider it my responsibility—with your help—to continually improve the course.

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STEINHARDT GRADING SCALE (NOTE: There is no A+ or D-)
A  93-100
A-  90-92
B+  87-89
B   83-86
B-  80-82
C+  77-79
C   73-76
C-  70-72
D+  65-69
D   60-64
F   Below 60
IP  Incomplete/Passing
IF  Incomplete/Failing
N   No Grade
* * *

**EVALUATION RUBRIC**

A=Excellent
The written assignments are comprehensive, detailed, and insightful. They creatively incorporate, or challenge, concepts from listening, discussions, lectures, and readings. Work demonstrates understanding of the underlying concepts discussed in class. The assignments demonstrate proficiency in the techniques discussed in class and its underlying aesthetics. Contributions to classroom discussions are frequent and insightful.

B=Good
Work demonstrates understanding of the underlying concepts discussed in class. Written assignments are complete and demonstrate proficiency in grasping the concepts discussed in class. Classroom participation is consistent.

C=Average
This work is adequate, but superficial. Assignments show some superficial understanding of what has been discussed in class. Written assignments fail to demonstrate knowledge of the concepts discussed in class. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory
This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the discussions and breakthroughs explained in class. Assignments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant concepts. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**
All students are responsible for understanding and complying with the NYU Steinhardt Statement on Academic Integrity. A copy is available at [http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity).

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**
Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities ([http://www.nyu.edu/csd/](http://www.nyu.edu/csd/), 719 Broadway, 2nd Floor, 212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor.