

RCAH291-01 Creative Workshop: *The Music of Southern Appalachia*

Fall 2011
M/W 3:00-4:50 pm
Room: C301

Professor Chris Scales
C320J – Ph. 884-6000
email: scalesch@msu.edu
Office Hrs: T/Th 1-2:30 pm

“It is a peculiarity of American culture that we assign so much of a learner’s success to his or her innate ability. Education research in Japanese and Chinese schools shows that teachers and students alike attribute their successes and failures more to training received and effort expended than to ability. When teachers believe that hard work is important to success and consistently convey this belief to students, they communicate both high expectations for student learning *and* pull an effective lever to improve results.”

- Ross Miller

(http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/prsp09/prsp09_miller.cfm?utm_source=pubs&utm_medium=blast&utm_campaign=peerreviewspring09)

“All music is folk music. I ain’t never hear a horse sing.”

- Louie Armstrong

Course Description

Appalachian communities have rich and deep musical traditions that have played a unique role in the musical, political, and social life of America. In this class, students will engage with this tradition through the first hand participation in the music, performing “old-time” string band music, ballad singing, shape-note singing, and related genres. We will also take some time to discuss some of the many social functions of this music in American public life, including its influence on other contemporary musical genres (bluegrass, country, folk and protest music), its connection with American leftist politics in the 20th century, and its central role in the public imagination of “authentic” American identity. Some background in music is recommended (but not required).

Course Goals

In general, the RCAH Creative Workshop curriculum was developed to give students the opportunity for a very particular kind of engagement with various art forms and artistic practices. First hand participation in the creation and/or performance *of* art is a unique and essential way that one learns *about* an art form or artistic practice. Creative Workshops attempt to get at this very real and very experiential kind of “knowledge of” artistic phenomena (as opposed to “knowledge about” arts and humanities, which is the content of many of your other RCAH courses). Ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood coined the term “bimusicality” to name this particular way of knowing a music through first hand participation in the performance of a musical style or genre. Learning a new musical style or genre is similar to learning a new language. In becoming truly bilingual one learns not only about syntax and grammar but also about the proper way to *use* language in particular social situations, understanding nuances in inflection, grasping the *poetics* of a language, etc. Similarly, learning a new musical style or genre involves more than simply learning how to play particular melodies and chords. There is an entire set of cultural conventions that accompany the performance of any unique style of music.

The central goal of this course is to help students develop “musical muscles” and give students the tools for their successful and enjoyable performance of Appalachian music. As such, the emphasis is on musical *development* rather than on achieving a particular set of concrete goals or skill sets. We will all come to this class with different abilities, knowledge, and starting points. This course is about the distance traveled rather than where we may eventually end up. Having said this, there are several areas of development we will work on over the course of the semester:

1) Students will develop and/or expand their repertoire of Appalachian music through the memorization of chords, melodies, and lyrics of a wide variety of well-known (and some more obscure) songs and instrumentals.

2) Students will learn differences between various regionally and historically defined Appalachian music styles and learn various idiomatic techniques for their particular instruments that are unique to each style.

3) Students will develop sound musicianship skills (musical memory, sight reading, ear training) and learn important ensemble playing principles with the goal improving their overall musical abilities.

4) Students will learn about the history and development of various Appalachian musical styles and genres, and the musicians that have, through history and presently, made important contributions to this music.

Course Structure

In pursuit of this “knowledge of” Appalachian music and the specific course goals listed above, classes will generally be run as part workshop, part music rehearsal, part jam session and part group discussion section. We will spend our four hours every week learning and rehearsing tunes by ear or with printed music, working on vocal and instrumental arrangements, and learning the social history of the particular tunes that we perform. By the end of the semester we should have a working repertoire of about 20-25 tunes that we can play *from memory*.

Required Texts

Classic Mountain Songs from Smithsonian Folkways SFW CD40094

Classic Old-Time Music SFW CD40093

Classic Old-Time Fiddle from Smithsonian Folkways SFW CD40193

All recordings are widely available online for purchase as a CD or for download at www.folkways.si.edu or www.amazon.com or whatever your favorite (LEGAL) music downloading site might be. The advantage of buying the CDs or from the Folkways website is that you also get the *liner notes*, which contain a *lot* of valuable information about the music and about the various musicians (the Folkways website allows you to freely download liner note pdf files of all of their recordings so you can get both the music and the liner notes electronically).

Reserve Items and Angel Online

There will be a number of other musical examples posted and available for audio stream listening (i.e. in a non-downloadable format) on the Angel site. I will also make available multiple copies of a number of Supplementary Listening CDs (SUPCDs) for those who wish to use hard copies of the listening examples. There will also occasionally be assigned readings posted to Angel for download.

Evaluation and Grading

There are *two* main components of a student's grade. Students will be evaluated according to:

1) Regular attendance and participation in class rehearsals and performances.

Needless to say, because this is a performance class, regular attendance and participation is *vital* to your success in the class and will comprise a significant part of your final grade. Because we only meet once a week, missing one class is equivalent to missing an entire week of classes. Students are allowed **ONE absence!!** Use it wisely. Beyond this a student's grade will be deducted 10% of the allotted A/P/P grade for every other absence. Students will, of course, be expected to practice regularly outside of class and come to rehearsals prepared (having learned assigned repertoire), in tune, and ready to play.

2) **Steady improvement and musical development**, as measured by repertoire acquisition, improving instrumental technique, and the ability to learn and incorporate appropriate idiomatic playing techniques into their own personal performance styles. There will be several assignments that will attempt to measure student advancement including:

a) Within the first week of the semester I will meet individually with every student in the class and we will negotiate and agree upon a set of developmental goals for the semester (which will include benchmarks like a general grasp of basic instrumental technique, tune memorization, idiomatic techniques specific to every instrument, etc.) These goals will differ for every student depending on their incoming skill level. We will have a mid-semester meeting to check on your progress and then each student will perform a final individual performance exam at end of the semester and you will be evaluated on the degree to which you have achieved or exceeded the developmental goals set out at the beginning of the semester.

b) Early in the semester, once I've had the opportunity to assess everyone's musical abilities, I will divide you into small ensemble groups of 4-5 people, an ensemble size that is more appropriate and common in Appalachian instrumental performance genres. These small groups will then meet both in and outside of class to arrange and rehearse their own song/tune to perform for the class and, if desired, for the end-of-semester concert.

c) There will be one other small out-of-class assignment that will involve the transcription, analysis, or composition of an Appalachian tune or song. More specific instructions and parameters for this assignment will be distributed later in the semester.

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance/Participation/Preparation/Ensemble Playing	40%
Performance Exam	30%
Small Ensemble Performance	20%
Transcription/Analysis/Composition	10%

GPA Grade scale

93-100%	= 4.0
87-93%	= 3.5
81-86%	= 3.0
76-80%	= 2.5
71-75%	= 2.0
66-70%	= 1.5
60-65%	= 1.0

Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of disability, please contact a staff member at the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities by visiting their office, located at 120 Bessey Hall or by phone at (517) 884-7273 (TTY: 517-3371293). For more information visit the website: <http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/>

Religious Observance Policy

It has always been the policy of the University to permit students and faculty to observe those holidays set aside by their chosen religious faith. It is the responsibility of those students who wish to be absent to make arrangements in advance with their professor.

Co-Curricular Events

End-of-Semester Concert

While this is an optional part of the class it is often both satisfying and fun to perform a public concert at the end of the semester. Not only does this give everyone a chance to publically show what they have achieved over the semester but it also becomes something tangible to work towards and look forward to.

Water Gap Retreat

In co-operation with Anita Skeen's Poets Laureate class, we are offering students the opportunity to travel to Appalachia to experience Appalachian lifeways first hand. **September 17-20** we will be taking two vans of students to the Water Gap Retreat (www.watergapretreat.com) in Elkins, West Virginia. While there we will visit with local historians, folklorists, musicians, weavers, naturalists, and farmers. Cost of the trip per student will be \$290 for the weekend, which includes meals, lodging, transportation and all scheduled field trips. This is a GREAT TRIP (as many students who have gone in previous years can testify) and well worth the time and expense. Check out the following links for documentary evidence of previous trips!!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laFaN9qLmtY&feature=related>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6RM-4_MztE

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU4HHvSxkPU&feature=related>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAJIFEV_HJk

RCAH-CMS Folk Music Program

Beginning in the fall semester and continuing throughout the year, the RCAH will host weekly group folk music lessons followed by old-time "jam sessions" for interested MSU students and the surrounding Lansing/East Lansing community. The lessons will be offered by the Community Music School and run every Tuesday night from 6:30-8:30 pm. RCAH students and residents of Snyder-Phillips can sign up for a 10-week block of lessons for \$99. Instrumental lessons include beginning, intermediate, and advanced fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitar, ukulele, and harmonica. These lessons will be connected to a jam session that will run from 7:30-9:30 and will be FREE and open to the public.

There will be "beginner" and "advanced" jam sessions that will run consecutively. The "beginner" session (7:30-8:30 pm) will be a more guided "teaching-oriented" jam session that will stress slower tempos and maximum participation for all skill levels. The "advanced" session

(8:30-9:30) will be more free form, less structured, and will involve any number of musicians calling, leading, and playing tunes. It is my hope that the members of *this* class will be regularly participating members of the jam session. Not only will this give us more opportunities to learn new tunes and work on our existing repertoire, but it will also introduce students to “jam session culture” and allow students to interact with and learn from other musicians from around MSU and within the larger community.

Contradancing

Students must attend and participate in at least ONE local contra dance. We will try to schedule a time when we can all go together. There are two local organizations that run these events:

Ten Pound Fiddle (www.tenpoundfiddle.org) holds monthly contras on the *first* Saturday of the month at the Central United Methodist Church (215 N. Capitol Avenue in downtown Lansing). There is always live music and a caller. The first dance is Saturday, October 3rd beginning at 8pm (7:30 for beginners)

Looking Glass (<http://my.voyager.net/~bonhanno/#local>) holds monthly contras on the *third* Saturday of every month, also at the Central United Methodist Church. The first dance is September 19th beginning at 8 pm (7:30 for beginners). They are also hosting a Contradance and music festival October 16-18.