

## ASSIGNMENT VI: POPULAR SONG

**Composition:** A popular song, at least two and a half minutes long.

**Due Date:** Tuesday, 30 April 2019 (Essay component may be submitted by Thursday, May 2, 2019)

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Grading Criteria:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Effective lyrics & text scansion            | <input type="checkbox"/> Lead sheet                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Identification of genre-specific techniques | <input type="checkbox"/> Length (2:30)                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Idiomatic writing                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Recording and/or score quality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Following instructions                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Essay quality                  |
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### DIRECTIONS

**Step 1:** Select a genre for your popular song and listen to a variety of pieces in that genre (at least 4).

**Step 2:** Write lyrics, melody and chords for a popular song. Your song should meet the following criteria:

- Your song must be at least two and a half minutes long
- You must write **original** lyrics
- You must use, at least: a singer and one polyphonic accompaniment instrument (i.e. piano, guitar, ukelele, banjo, synthesizer, keytar, organ, sitar, etc.).
- You must identify a genre for your song and identify techniques which characterize that genre (i.e. form, chord progressions, texture, etc.).

The following steps may help you in the composition process:

**a. Begin writing lyrics for the song.** You may use any subject matter suitable for class performance; humor and even parody are acceptable as long as your lyrics are original (**newly written for this project - do not use previously written lyrics either by yourself or someone else**). It is sometimes helpful to choose a lyrical hook, such as a pun or specific turn of phrase (“a hard day’s night,” “un-break my heart,” *etc.*) that you can build the rest of the lyrics around. Consider writing lyrics for the chorus first, then creating lyrics for the first verse (and optionally pre-chorus) that lead up to the chorus.

**b. Set your lyrics to chords and melody.** There are multiple approaches to this; you may find that choosing chords will help you determine an effective melody, or vice versa. Note that specific genres sometimes have their own conventions regarding melodic range, harmonic rhythm, *etc.*, so listening to and transcribing other songs in your selected genre can provide help and inspiration.

**c. Fill out remaining lyrics depending on the form you have chosen.** Continue writing your verses. Write a bridge which contrasts the verse and chorus; the bridge may be instrumental or it may include lyrics, or can even have a section of each.

**d. Create a lead sheet.** Notate your melody with lyrics, and place chord symbols above the staff. Notate chord extensions (*e.g.*, “Cmaj9”) if appropriate.

**e. Experiment with additional chords.** If your chord progressions are fairly simple, consider other possibilities, such as leading into chords with secondary dominants or substituting diatonic chords with borrowed chords on the same root.

**f. Experiment with instrumentation.** Your song should be performable by a vocalist and single guitar, piano, or synthesizer accompaniment (etc.) and you may keep just this instrumentation for the final product if you wish. You may also include various other instruments as the genre allows: guitars, basses, percussion, synths, etc. It may be helpful to record the voice part into digital audio software such as Audacity, Ableton Live, or Garage Band (all available in the MALL) and experiment by adding bass guitar, drums and other percussion, backing vocals, brass, synth pads, and even sound effects. We will have an optional session outside of class for a studio technique primer.

**g. Experiment with studio techniques.** If appropriate to the song and genre, consider using digital audio software to add reverb or filters. We will have an optional session outside of class for a studio technique primer.

**h. Write a short analysis.** In a 500+ word essay, describe your chosen genre by providing a short analysis and discussing historical context. Include examples from the four songs you listened to in step 1. Compare and contrast that to your own song: include a brief analysis of form, chord progressions, rhythm, texture, etc. How does your song fit (or not) within the genre illustrated in your inspiration material? Also provide a descriptive analysis of your own text setting. The analysis will be graded based on content but also spelling/grammar and quality of argument/analysis. (This may be submitted by May 2, 2019 at 8am to Dropbox).

**You may choose one of two options for a "recording":**

**h. Create a final recording.** Based on conventions of your selected genre, make a recording of the piece. You may wish to record a live performance, or construct a final product in a digital audio program. Make the final project as "radio-ready" as possible; this may involve multiple recording takes, and even combining parts of several takes to create a single recording. We will have an optional session outside of class for a studio technique primer.

**e. Create a full score for all parts.** Instead of a recording, you may submit a fully realized score (and audio file) that includes notation for all instrumental and vocal parts (i.e. drums, guitar + strumming pattern, piano, bass guitar, backup singers). This should then be exported as an audio file.

**Step 3: Save your lead sheet as a PDF file.** Name your lead sheet in the format "LastName - Popular Song - Lead Sheet." Ensure the format of the file is .pdf.

**Step 4: Save your analysis as a PDF file.** Name your essay in the format "LastName - Popular Song - Analysis." Ensure the format of the file is .pdf. (Due by May 2, 2019 at 8am).

**Step 5: Save your recording as a digital audio file.** Record, save or export the file in a standard digital audio file format (for example, MP3, AAC, AIFF, or WAV). Name your file in the format "Last Name - Pop Song - Audio." If you chose to do an instrumental score, also export the file as a PDF and save as "Last Name - Pop Song - Full Score." Ensure the format of the file is .pdf.

**Step 6: Submit your song.** Upload all necessary files into a Dropbox Folder Titled "Popular Song".

If you are having your piece performed in class:

- Print copies of the lead sheet for the players, and bring them to the performance.