Iconic Figures of Popular Music: Bob Dylan
Spring 2018

Course no. MUSC 424
Section no. 47228D
Units: 2
Time: Mondays 12:00-1:50pm
Room: TMC G156

Course instructor: Bill Biersach
Instructor’s office: KDC 241
Instructor’s office hours: MW 9 – 9:50 am
Office phone: (213) 740-7416
Instructor’s email: biersach@usc.edu

The Premise

Bruce Springsteen said it best on January 20th, 1988, at the induction of Bob Dylan into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame:

Dylan was a revolutionary. Bob freed your mind the way Elvis freed your body. He showed us that because the music was innately physical did not mean it was anti-intellectual. He had the vision and the talent to make a pop song that contained the whole world. He invented a new way a pop singer could sound, broke through the limitations of what a recording artist could achieve and changed the face of rock and roll forever. Without Bob, the Beatles wouldn’t have made Sgt. Pepper, the Beach Boys wouldn’t have made Pet Sounds, the Sex Pistols wouldn’t have made “God Save the Queen,” U2 wouldn’t have done “Pride (in the Name of Love),” Marvin Gaye wouldn’t have done “What’s Going On,” the Count Five would not have done “Psychotic Reaction,” Grandmaster Flash might not have done “The Message,” and there never would have been a group named the Electric Prunes. To this day, Bob’s own modern work has gone unjustly underappreciated because it’s had to stand in the shadow … So I’m just here tonight to say thanks, to say that I wouldn’t be here without you, to say that there isn’t a soul in this room who does not owe you his thanks.

Course Goal

Is Mr. Springsteen’s accolade above an example of hyperbole, enthusiastic overstatement, understatement, fantasy, or the simple truth? In this course we will plumb the self-styled conundrum (musical, professional, and personal) that is Bob Dylan. We will explore examples of his work from various stages of his career, consider his lyrics and changing styles, view documentaries, and no doubt argue over the production quality
of his recordings. In addition, the students themselves will research his albums and prepare to lead discussions on their quality and content.

**Grades**

Grades will be based on the following:

Weekly assignments (written discussion points based on reading assignments) 25 Points
Oral presentations (album reviews) 25 Points
Three essay exams 25 Points
Participation (attendance and class engagement) 25 Points

Scores for course grade will be tabulated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94 - 100</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 – 93</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87 – 89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>84 – 86</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>80 – 83</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>77 – 79</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>74 – 76</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>70 – 73</td>
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<td>67 – 69</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<td>64 – 66</td>
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<tr>
<td>60 – 63</td>
<td>D-</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 - 59</td>
<td>F</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Texts**


**Attendance and Class Participation**

Attendance is important in this course. Two classes may be missed without penalty, but the third and following missed classes will cause your grade to diminish by 2 percentage point each. No distinction will be made between excused and unexcused absences. If you find yourself in unusual circumstances or become persistently ill, contact the professor directly.

Furthermore, your active participation is considered mandatory at all class sessions. Distracted or disengaged (read “electronically engrossed”) behavior will be considered equivalent to an absence.

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**BOB DYLAN**

**Schedule of Album Presentations and Reading Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>ALBUM</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>Clinton Heylin</th>
<th>Jonathan Cot ed.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><em>Bob Dylan</em> 1962</td>
<td>Jan. 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>(Holiday)</td>
<td>Jan. 15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td><em>The Times The Are a-Changin’</em> 1964</td>
<td>Jan. 29</td>
<td>Chpt. 8-9</td>
<td>Chpt. 3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td><em>Highway 61 Revisited</em> 1965</td>
<td>Feb. 5</td>
<td>Chpt. 10-12</td>
<td>Chpt. 5-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td><strong>FIRST MIDTERM</strong></td>
<td>Feb. 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>(Holiday)</td>
<td>Feb. 19</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>(Spring break)</td>
<td>Mar. 12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td><strong>SECOND MIDTERM</strong></td>
<td>Mar. 26</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
13. **Slow Train Coming**  
   1979  
   Apr. 2  
   Chpt. 24-28  
   Chpt. 14-18

14. **Infidels**  
   1983  
   Apr. 9  
   Chpt. 29-30  
   Chpt. 19-24

15. **Time Out of Mind**  
   1997  
   Apr. 16  
   Chpt. 31-39  
   Chpt. 25-28

16. **Love and Theft**  
   2001  
   Apr. 23  
   The Finishing End  
   Chpt. 29-31

17. **FINAL EXAM**  
   Friday, May 4  
   11am – 12noon

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**Statement of Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* [https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/]. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, [http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/].

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* [http://equity.usc.edu/] or to the *Department of Public Safety* [http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us]. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* [http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/] provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [http://sarc.usc.edu] describes reporting options and other resources.

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**Support Systems for Students**

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* [http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali] which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for
international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs
<http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html> provides
certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.
If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency
Information <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates,
including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard,
teleconferencing, and other technology.

Bibliography

2005.

Brown, Peter, and Gaines, Steven. *The Love You Make: The Insider’s Story of the


Campbell, Michael, and Brody, James. *Rock and Roll: An Introduction*. New York:


1987.


FILMS


