

Pop Strings Ensemble
M 5pm–7pm
Spring 2020

Instructor

Ginny Luke
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Office Hours:

Mondays 4–5pm, 7–8pm

Additional hours by appointment. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you feel you need a little extra help.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Pop Strings Ensemble! This class will study the art of pop strings from many different perspectives and styles. You will apply the lessons through performance on your instrument and in a variety of written worksheets that will enhance performance on your instrument. All lessons, exercises, and activities will be built around tunes that are commonly known in the popular styles of pop, rock, country, bluegrass, latin, and jazz repertoire.

OUTCOMES

The most important skills for a pop musician to have are a great ear, improvisational skills and an understanding of pop styles. As a pop player you **MUST** know the language of each style, and this language is found in the tunes that makeup the repertoire. We will focus on various styles over the course of the semester. We will study the melody, form, and harmony of the songs in these styles. We will apply principles of music (jazz and classical) theory, history, performance practice, and instrumental technique (some classical, some new or alternative!) to maximize our understanding of these styles.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- String instrument (bring pickup if you own)
- Black binder
- Amazing Slow Downer app
- Metronome app
- Tuner app
- Dropbox
- Music manuscript book or paper for note taking and transcription

Manuscript paper and your instrument must be brought to every class.

TOPICS TO BE COVERED:

- 1) Pop string sound production, phrasing and stylistic nuance
- 2) Ear-training
- 3) Improvisation
- 4) Rapid transcription of harmonies and solos (for studio and live work)
- 5) Sight-reading with stylistic accuracy and “on-the-spot” decision making
- 6) Writing for small groups (2–6 strings)
- 7) Contemporary bowing techniques: Chugging, chucking, swing, double shuffle
- 8) Groove and rhythmic pocket
- 9) Comping patterns
- 10) Identifying keys and chord changes
- 11) Identifying pop song form
- 12) Common roles in pop/alternative string ensembles

You will be graded on the following:

- 1) Play-tests
- 2) Music preparation: Binder/folder with Pop Worksheets and organized music
- 3) Audio preparation: Organized audio files (playlist or Dropbox folder), utilizing metronome and Amazing Slow Downer app
- 4) Final Performance

ASSIGNMENTS and GRADING

Assignments in this class will be a combination of performance testing, classroom performance, and written worksheets that will be handed in. The assignments will be broken down as follows.

PLAYTESTING (50% of your total grade)

Playtesting will be the most intense and the most valuable activity. There are FOUR (4) playlists on **WEEK 3, WEEK 4, WEEK 8, and WEEK 13**. The playtest is an individual activity where class members play separately or together, demonstrating the techniques and lessons studied in class.

POP WORKSHEETS (25% of your total grade)

Understanding the key, meter, producer, players and history of a song imperative to knowing how to interpret and play it. There are 8 pop worksheets in the semester which are kept in your binder. Pop worksheets are due at the beginning of each class.

FINAL PERFORMANCE (10% of your total grade)

As we study songs in class we will choose our pieces for a final performance showcase. Attendance at the showcase performance is required; unavoidable or legitimate circumstances will be pardoned if discussed and excused in advance. If student cannot attend final performance, they must submit a video recording of final performance.

CLASS PARTICIPATION, PREPARATION AND ATTENDANCE (10% of your total grade)

We will be studying a great deal of material and regular class attendance is necessary in order to keep up. There will also be ample opportunity to play in class, as a soloist or as part of the group, and you must demonstrate that you are prepared. Attendance will be taken.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1 – Introduction + Eleanor Rigby

Jan 13

WEEK 2 – No class

Jan 20

PROJECT - Memorize Eleanor Rigby

WEEK 3 – Playtest Eleanor Rigby + Pop Strings Worksheet 1 due

Jan 27

Billie Jean

WEEK 4 – Playtest Billie Jean + Pop Strings Worksheet 2 due

Feb 3

“Georgia On My Mind” + “Man’s World”

WEEK 5 – “Georgia” Audio + Pop Strings Worksheet 3 due

Feb 10

Minor Swing

Take the A Train

WEEK 6 – No class

Feb 17

WEEK 7 –Career pages + Pop Worksheet 4 due,

Review/Play in class: Eleanor Rigby, Georgia, Billie Jean, Minor Swing, Take the A Train

Feb 24

Wagon Wheel

WEEK 8 – MID TERM PLAYTESTING

Binders due

Mar 2

PLAYTEST, anything we have covered

WEEK 9 – Pop Strings Worksheet 5 due

Mar 9

September

WEEK 10 - No class

Mar 16

(March 15-22 – SPRING RECESS)

WEEK 11 – September audio due, Pop Worksheet 6 due

Mar 23

“How Insensitive” and “Corcovado”

String arrangers

WEEK 12 - “How Insensitive”/“Corcovado” audio + Pop Worksheet 7 due

Mar 30

Sweet Child of Mine

Kashmir

WEEK 13 – Playtest “Sweet Child of Mine”, Pop Worksheet 8 due

Apr 6

Review/Play in class: Eleanor Rigby, Georgia, Billie Jean, Minor Swing, Take the A Train, Wagon Wheel, September, Sweet Child of Mine, Kashmir

WEEK 14 – Rehearsal

April 13

Review/Play in class: Eleanor Rigby, Georgia, Billie Jean, Minor Swing, Take the A Train, Wagon Wheel, September, Sweet Child of Mine, Kashmir

WEEK 15 – Rehearsal

Apr 20

Review/Play in class: Eleanor Rigby, Georgia, Billie Jean, Minor Swing, Take the A Train, Wagon Wheel, September, Sweet Child of Mine, Kashmir

WEEK 16 – Performance and Course Evaluations

Apr 27

Performance date TBD

The Final Performance serves as the Final Exam.

Grading:

USC uses the following grading system:

CR = credit (passing grade for a non-letter graded course equivalent to "B" or 3.0 quality or better for graduate credit and "C-" or 1.7 for undergraduate credit)

NC = no credit (for a non-letter-graded course equivalent to a "B" or less for graduate and less than "C-" for undergraduate)

P = pass (passing grade equivalent to a "B" or 3.0 quality or better for graduate and "C-" or 1.7 for an undergraduate credit course taken on a Pass/No Pass basis)

NP = no pass (less than the equivalent of a "B" for a graduate or "C-" for an undergraduate for a letter-graded course taken on a Pass/No Pass basis).