

# ASIAN AMERICAN MUSIC

V15.0800.003

Spring, 2000

A/P/A Studies Program and Institute

New York University

Professor Jason Kao Hwang

**CLASS HOURS:** Wednesdays, 3:30-6:15pm

**CLASS LOCATION:** Wavery Building, Room 566B, 100 Washington Square East

**OFFICE HOURS:** Wednesdays, 1-3pm or by appointment.

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This is a survey course, for musicians and non-musicians, of contemporary Asian American music, its historical roots and cross-cultural influences. By exploring a rich diversity of music, we will challenge definitions of both Asian American culture and American music.

We will listen to major figures but not necessarily household names, of Asian American rock, hip-hop, techno, R&B, classical, jazz, traditional and "non-category" music. The Mountain Brothers, Jamez, the Chinkees, James Iha, Seam, Towa Tei, the Bruce Lee Band, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Kenny Endo, Chou Wen Chung, Unary Chung, Chen Yi, Tan Dun, Ushio Torikai, Ikue Mori, Francis Wong, Mark Izu, Jon Jang, Jin Hi Kim, Sang Wong Park, "Hiroshima", Nobuko Miyamoto, Chris Iijima, "Charlie" Chin are some of the artists who will be introduced. Also non-Asian American artists influenced by Asian music such as John Cage, Lou Harrison, Ralph Samuelson and Phillip Gelb will be discussed. Recordings and reading material have often been donated by the artists themselves to represent their work. Students will be encouraged to contribute cassette recordings to the class "music library" available at the Bobst Library. Students will also be encouraged to attend Asian American concerts which will be announced weekly in class.

Outstanding guest artists will visit our class. The Japanese American drum collective, Soh Daiko, Chinese American singer/songwriter Kevin So, and Korean hip-hop artist, Jamez, will perform, demonstrate and discuss their music.

## **TEXTS:**

- 1) Yoshida, George. *Reminiscing in Swingtime*. San Francisco: National Japanese American Historical Society, 1997
  - available at the Asian American Writers' Workshop, 37 St. Mark's Place, 212 228 6718 (between 2nd and 3rd Avenue, underneath the "Gap")
  - Present your NYU ID with this syllabus and receive a 15% discount.
- 2) Course reader
  - available at Advanced Copy, 552 La Guardia Place, 212 388 1001 (just south of W.3rd St.)
- 3) Additional readings will be provided in class.
- 4) Additional video screenings to be announced.

## REQUIREMENTS:

The success of this class hinges greatly upon listening, reading, self-reflection and active class discussion. Unexcused absences are highly discouraged. The final grade is determined by the following criteria:

20% Class Participation

36% Weekly Journal - nine entries, typed, double-spaced, 1-2 pages; graded pass/fail @ 4% each

44% Final Paper, typed, double-spaced, 8-10 pages

## SCHEDULE:

### Week 1, January 19

- Introductions and Overview
- Music and the Construction of Asian American culture
- Introducing Asian American drums: the North American Taiko movement

#### Readings:

Lam, Joseph, S.C. *Embracing "Asian American Music" as an Heuristic Device*, 1-22

Yoon, Paul. *Soh Daiko*, Paul Yoon, 1-6

Ko, John. *Drumming up a Storm*, Dialogue, 30-33

Fromartz, Samuel. *Anything But Quiet*, Natural History, 1-11

#### Screenings:

*Taiko*, National North American Taiko Conference

*Rising Sun*, (excerpts)

*Maceo: Demon Drummer from East L.A.*, 44 min.

*Afterbirth*, 34 min.

Journal Entry #1, due January 26

What music do you listen to? How does music express your personality, identity and history?

### Week 2, January 26 :

- **GUEST ARTISTS: SOH DAIKO**, Performance and workshop

*When Soh Daiko plays, its members whoop and whirl, moving together with mastery...The physical aspects of their drumming require high energy, endurance and movement... And by combining traditional compositions with their own arrangements, Soh Daiko members are developing an Asian American artform, while also preserving ancient traditions.* New York Times

**Class will meet at the Soh Daiko dojo located in the New York Buddhist Church at 332 Riverside Drive, between 105 and 106 Streets. Telephone: 212 678 9213 - THIS NUMBER SHOULD BE USED ONLY FOR EMERGENCIAS. (Know that many people answer this phone, and not all will be aware of this class.)**

#### Readings:

Wang, Oliver. *Between the Notes: Finding Asian America in Popular Music*, 1-29

Stokes, Martin. "Introduction", *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, "1-24

Chang, Yahlin. *Asian Identity Crisis*, 1

Omi, Michael. *Cultural Fusion: An Interview with Dan and June Kuramoto of Hiroshima*, 1-4

Omi, Michael. *Hiroshima Reborn*, 1-2

Mark, Diane. *Nobuko Miyamoto: The 'Mountain Moving Days Continue*, 1-7

Journal Entry #2 due, Feb. 2: What images does taiko evoke? How does this music contribute to identity? Who are the people who play this music? Is this music American?

### **Week 3, February 2**

- Pioneers of Asian American Music

Hiroshima, The United Nations, Visions, A Grain of Sand, The Heat, Yoko Ono

#### Readings:

Takemitsu, Toru. "The Landscape of the Score", *Confronting the Silence*, 46-48

Takemitsu, Toru. "A Single Sound", "The Distance from the Ud to Biwa", "Noh and Transcience", *Confronting the Silence*, 51-58

Chou Wen Chung, *Sights and Sounds: Remembrances*, 1-12

Chou Wen Chung. *Asian Music Today? What is it?*, 1-7

#### Screening:

*Cruisin J Town*, Duane Kubo, 30 min., (about Hiroshima)

### **Week 4, February 9**

Asian American Classical

- Chou Wen Chung, Paul Chihara, Earl Kim, Bright Sheng, Unary Chung

#### Readings:

Zhou Long. *Some Thoughts on Contemporary Chinese Music*, Music From China, 2-3

Hayman, R.I.P. *Readers' Forum Chinese Music Internationally*, Music From China, 6-8

Su Zheng. *Claiming Diaspora, Music, Transnationalism and Cultural Politics in Asian/Chinese America*, 93-122

Sloboda, John A. *The Musical Mind, The Cognitive Psychology of Music*, "Music as a Cognitive Skill", 1-5

#### Screening:

*Toru Takemitsu*, Charlotte Zwerin, videodisc (58 min.)

Weekly journal entries(#3 - #9) reviewing CDs and/or concerts. Due March 29.

### **Week 5, February 16**

- Asian American Classical Music - , Ushio Torikai, Tan Dun, Chen Yi, Zhou Long
- Asian American music by non-Asians? Cowell, Cage, Harris, Partch, Nancarrow

#### Readings:

Hwang, Jason K. *Beijing International Jazz Festival: Beijing, China*, Jazziz

Hazell, Ed. *Interview with Jason Hwang*, Cadence Magazine

Ku, Robert Ji-Song, ed., *Where is "East Meets West"?*, Dialogue Magazine

Pothecary, Andrew. *East Side Story*, The Wire  
press biography, Jason Kao Hwang

Lam, Joseph S. C. "Encountering Chinese-American Music and Culture in Cincinnati, 28-31 March 1996", "Afterthoughts on a New Music Festival: New Directions in Asian-American Music, 20-233 April 1994", *Current Musicology*, 175-187

Screenings:

*Lou Harrison: "cherish, conserve, consider, create"*, videocassette, 28 min.

*John Cage: I have nothing to say and I'm saying it*, videocassette, 56 min.

**Week 6, February 23**

- Music of Jason Kao Hwang
- Early Asian American Jazz -Paul Togawa, Pat Suzuki, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Flip Nunez

Readings:

Yoshida, George. "Bata-Kusai Jazz Singers: Nisei Music Makers in Prewar Japan", *Reminiscing in Swingtime*, 41-116

Leong, George. *Stockton: A Birthplace of Filipino American Jazz*, 1-2

Screenings:

*Forbidden City*, 56 min. , Arthur Dong

*The Far East Side Band*, Live Screen: of Asia Society concert, excerpt

**Week 7, March 1**

Asian American Jazz

Badal Roy, Akiri Tana, Phil Woo, Sumi Toonaka, Terumasa Hino, Masuo

Readings:

Yoshida, George. "Of Jive Bombers and Stardusters", *Reminiscing in Swingtime*, 119 -188

Cohen, Aaron. *Going Global*, Downbeat

Shatz, Adam. *New Seekers in Jazz Look to the East*, Adam Shatz, New York Times

Ouellete, Dan. *Horn Dynasty, The Varying Sounds of Asian American Jazz*, Pulse

O'Malley, Robert. *Boston's Other Asian Musicians: Jeff Song, Kevin So, Jane Wang*, Sampan

Hazell, Ed. "In Order to Form a More Perfect Union, Exploring Chinese Folk Music and American Jazz Pianist Jon Jang Deepens His Sense of Self", *Jazziz*, 1-3

Screenings:

Film: *Days of Waiting*, Steve Okazaki, 28 min.

*Portrait of Toshiko Akiyoshi*, Renee Cho, 58 minutes

**Week 8, March 8**

- Contemporary Asian American Jazz

Russel Baba, Gerald Oshita Frances Wong, Mark Izu, Jon Jang, Fred Ho, Akiri Tana, Vijay Iyer, Susie Ibarra, Steve Hashimoto, Anthony Brown, Jeff Song

Readings:

Yoshida, George. "Establishing New Roots, Postwar Music", "Reflections on the Beat", *Reminiscing in Swingtime*, 235-281

Wu Man, *"The Points": Story of a Pipa Solo*

Chen Tao. *New Music, A Performer's Perspective*

Har, Janie. *Classic Chic*, 37-39

Tang Liangxing. *Observations on Chinese Music Today*, Music From China

Screenings:

*Susumi*, 30 min.

*United Front*, 30 min.

Live concert Screen: of Sumi Tonooka with Kenny Endo, excerpt

**SPRING BREAK  
MARCH 13 - MARCH 17**

**Week 9, March 22**

- Performers of Varied Traditions

Sarah Chang, Yo Yo Ma, Ahn Trio, Vanessa-Mae, Margaret Len Tang, Min Xiao Fen, Gao Hong, Tang Lianxing, Jin Hi Kim, Wang Guo Wei, Sang Won Park

Readings:

Huotari, Allen. *AAJ Interview with Phillip Gelb*

Cronin, Tania. *On Writing for Shakuhachi: a Western Perspective*, 77-81

Samuelson, Ralph. *Shakuhachi and the American Composer*, 83-93

Hisama, Ellie. *Postcolonialism on the make: The music of John Mellencamp, David Bowie and John Zorn*, 91-104

**Week 10, March 29**

- Blurring the Lines - Non Asian Performers Playing Asian Traditional Instruments

Shakuchi: Phillip Gelb, Ned Rothenberg, Ralph Samuelson

Indian flute: Steve Gorn

- Orientalism in American Music - John Mellencamp, David Bowie, God is My Co-Pilot,, Japan, China Drum, Asia, Five Chinese Brothers, China Crisis

Readings:

Hisama, Ellie. *From Academe to Activism: Asian Americans Respond to John Zorn*, 1- 22

Beels, Alex. *Musician John Zorn's Brutal Images of Asians Draw Fire*, Asian New Yorker

Wong, William. *Extreme images of Asian Women*, Oakland Tribune

Hamilton, Denise. *Zorn's 'Garden' Sprouts Discontent*, LA Times

Hwang, Jason K. *From Confrontation to Collaboration*, Asian New Yorker

Richardson, Derek. *Zornophobia, Debate Flares Over John Zorn's Album Art*, SF Bay Guardian

Screenings:

*Slaying the Dragon*, 60 min.

*Picturing Oriental Girls: A [Re] Educational Screen:tape*, 15 minutes

DUE APRIL 5: Propose topic of final term paper for approval. Explore definitions of Asian American culture through the contrast and comparison of two or more artists/bands.
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**Week 11, April 5**

Orientalism in American Music

- A Postmodern Conflict: The case of John Zorn
- **GUEST ARTIST: Singer/songwriter Kevin So**, a three-time Boston Music Award nominee, sings his songs about racism, racial harmony and his upbringing in a Chinese American home. He will also lead the class in singing selections from Jack Tchen's Orientalist song collection of the 1920's and 30's.

*It's hard to imagine that a solo artist can evoke such emotion with just a guitar, voice and harp, but that's exactly what Kevin So does on this superb 12 song-album. His voice has a startling quality that immediately gains your attention, and later, your respect. Metronome*

Readings:

Rose, Tricia. "'All Aboard the Night Train': Flow and Layering and Rupture in Postindustrial New York", *Black Noise, Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, 21-61  
 Wang, Oliver. *Asian Americans and Hip Hop, Asia Week*  
 Rao, Sharmila S. *Interview with DJ Rekha*, Sharmila S. Rao  
 Su Zheng. *From Toison to New York, Muk'yu Songs in Folk Tradition*, 165 -178; 191-205

**Week 12, April 12**

- Folk/Blues: Kevin So, Blake Chen, Chika Sekiguchi, David Pajo
- Experimental: Ikue Mori
- Hip Hop: Mountain Brothers, Key Kool and DJ Rehttmatic, Superchink, DJ Rekha

Readings:

Shin, Paul H. B. *Hot new music has some very old roots*, Daily News  
 English, Merle. *Artist Finds Voice in Hip-Hop Hybrid*, Newsday  
 Eng, Alvin. *Music Millenium Rap, Jamez: Aziatic hip hop for the masses, if they dare*, Long Island Voice

Screenings:

Film: *The Bhangra Wrap*, NAATA, 20 min.  
*Singing to Remember*, Asian American Arts Center, 30 min.  
*P'ansori*, Asia Society, 30 min.

**Week 13, April 19**

- Music Production: Sampling and Photography: The Weaving of Artifact
- **GUEST ARTIST: Korean American hip hop artist JAMEZ** will rap a set and discuss his creative process.

*Jamez makes "pointed commentary about the status of immigrants, the Asian American experience and the clash between Manhattan's wealthy and the working class masses of Queens... With a slick mix of beats, Shaman chants and folk drums, Jamez makes his calls for social justic palatable."* Issac Buzman, Newsday

Readings:

Strauss, Neil. *A Burst of Sound, Bright as the Rising Sun*, New York Times  
 Kim, Ben. *Seam in Seoul, Korean American indie rockers meet their Korean counterparts at the Soran Modern Alternative Pop Festival*

**Week 14, April 26**

- Rock, R&B, Dance, Techno: Seam, Home Grown, James Iha, Towa Tei, Guitar Wolf, Cibbo Matta, Slant, Blake Chen, Bruce Lee Band, The Chinkees, Jocelyn Enriquez
- Not commonly known as Asian Americans - Foxie Brown, Billy Crawford, Tatyana Ali

- Asian Artists marketed in the US: Pizzicato Five, Buffalo Daughters, Angun, Cobra, Cui Jen, Guitar Wolf, Asian Dub Foundation, Talvin Singh, Haino Keiji, Bomb the Twist

**Week 15, May 3**

- **FINAL PAPER DUE**