"Rock 'n' roll is a metaphorical arena, and that is why you can find the abyss in a harmless old pop song."

No matter whether we read it as threat or promise, this dictum by the eminent music journalist and scholar Greil Marcus claims boundless significance for popular music. And indeed, the practices, sounds and technologies of popular music culture necessarily lead us to ponder core questions of cultural studies, cultural theory and cultural critique – questions such as the positioning of the subject, the performative routines of collectivity and the power of cultural forms in the context of a capitalist consumer society.

Accordingly, the lecture will offer both an integrative discussion of general key concepts in cultural analysis and an introduction to popular music studies. Topics include:

- the everyday uses of music and the contested category of ‘the popular’;
- fan culture and the representative power of music;
- concert performance, the audience, and the political power of ritual;
- affect and the body in popular music culture;
- ethnicity and gender, on-stage and off;
- sound studies and the cultural resonance of the singer’s voice;
- plurimediality and the music video.

Participants should at least have completed an introductory course in (British or American) cultural studies. The lecture is primarily aimed at students in the BA and Lehramt programmes. However, it may also be of interest to Master students with a stake in the field.

**Form of the lecture (#WueOnline)**

The lecture will be held ONLINE (see Zoom link in the WueCampus course room) and LIVE, i.e. each Tuesday from 10.15 to 11.45 a.m. Please understand that it will not be possible to offer a recording of the lecture.

**Assessment**

Assessment will be through a final test (Klausur). The successful participation in the test will depend on both continuous participation in the lecture and continuous reading in the context of the lecture (see AR texts below).

Depending on the general situation at the time, the final test will be held either on site or electronically. The decision will be taken c. two weeks before the date of the test. In any case, the test will be held on TUE, the 8th of February, 14.00-16.00 (that is at a different time of day than the lecture itself!).
Accompanying reading and discussion course

The lecture is accompanied by a reading and discussion course (Lektürekurs und Begleitveranstaltung zur Vorlesung 'Popular music and Cultural Studies') under the same title. This separate (and non-obligatory) course will offer opportunities for delving deeper into the topics dealt with in the lecture. The texts listed as assigned reading for the lecture as well as the ‘assigned listening’ samples will provide a backbone for the reading and discussion course. However, there is room for variation. If you are interested, please note that you have to enrol separately for the accompanying course.

Preparing for the lecture

In preparation for the lecture, please consult the *Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. by Simon Frith et al. (2001), which is available as an e-book through the university library. **Before the first meeting, participants will be expected to have studied at least chapters 4 and 9 from this book (Simon Frith on "Pop music" and Richard Middleton on "Pop, rock and interpretation").**

Further introductory reading: For standard introductions to the study of popular music and popular music culture, see especially Tim Wall’s *Studying Popular Music Culture* (2nd ed., 2013) and Roy Shuker’s *Understanding Popular Music Culture* (5th ed., 2016). The following book will be especially valuable as a study aid all through the course of the semester: Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, eds., *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction* (2nd ed. 2011; available as an e-book through the university library).

Programme

AR = Assigned reading → Please read in preparation for the respective meeting!

AL = Assigned listening → Please listen to and examine these songs and clips in preparation for the respective meeting.

Texts for (optional) further reading will be announced in the course of the lecture.

26/10

**Introduction**
- Approach & objectives of the lecture
- “Don’t Stop the Music” (a first set of audiovisual samples)

**AL:**
- Rihanna, “Don’t Stop the Music” (music video, dir. by Anthony Mandler, 2007). [LINK]
- Jamie Cullum, “Don’t Stop the Music” (cover version of Rihanna’s song; music video, 2009). [LINK]

02/11

**Cultural Studies (& Popular Music Culture)**
- ‘Culture’
- ‘Cultural studies’
- Popular music culture (& why it matters)

**AR:** Chris Barker, “An Introduction to Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage, 2008) 3-38. [Pages 3-12 are assigned reading; the rest of the chapter is recommended as further reading.] [WueCampus]
09/11

**Popular music and/as popular culture**
- Concepts: 'The popular' & 'popular culture'
- Popular music & populism

**AL:**

**AR:** Barker, [from the chapter:] "Questions of Culture and Ideology," *Cultural Studies* 39-54 [= subchapters on "Culture with a Capital C" // "Culture Is Ordinary" // "High Culture/Low Culture"]. [WueCampus.]

16/11

**The music industry**
- The music industry
- The concept of the ‘culture industries’
- Popular music about the music industry

**AL:**
- Pink Floyd, "Have a Cigar" (1975). [LINK.]


23/11

**Space/s**
- Sound and Space
- Space and Popular Music Culture

**AL:**


30/11

**Technology / media**
- Accidental & essential technologies in popular music
- Guitar technologies & the cultural work of the electric guitar
- Media / mediation / immediacy
- Culture and technology

**AL:**

**AR:** Paul Théberge, “‘Plugged In’: Technology and Popular Music,” *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Frith et al. 3-25. [Accessible online through UBW.]
The audience / fans

AL:


Subjectivity, collectivity, and the power of music

- Disco music & the concept of subjectivity
- Subjectivity, collectivity, and the concert

AL:
- Thirty Seconds to Mars, "Do or Die" (music video, dir. by Jared Leto, 2013) [LINK.]


‘Ethnicity’ / ‘Black music’

- Ethnic difference & diasporic subjectivity
- African American music & the history of popular music
- Interrogating the concept of ethnicity

AL:

AR:

[Christmas break]

‘Body’ / performance / stardom – The case of Beyoncé

- The body as a site of culture
- The concept of performance
- Performing ethnicity, gender and class

AL (and AR):
- Beyoncé, material from the artist’s website. [LINK.]
• Beyoncé, various music videos mentioned by Durham.


18/01

**Genre / gender / voice**

- Sexism and rock music
- Women in country music
- The significance of the voice


AL:
• Tammy Wynette, “Stand by Your Man” (1969). [LINK.]
• Kate Bush, “Feel It” (1978). [LINK.]


25/01

**Plurimediality & visuality**

AR: [No new texts assigned – please return to relevant texts listed previously or consider the further reading texts listed below.]


AL (& watching):
• Childish Gambino, “This Is America” (music video, dir. by Hiro Murai, 2018). [LINK.]

01/02

**Conclusion**

Final test: TUE, 08/02, 14.00-16.00 [Please note that the final test takes place on a Tuesday but at a different time of day than the lecture!]