An Undergraduate Syllabus for “Global Music History”

OLIVIA BLOECHL

This syllabus is designed for an introductory-level, general-education undergraduate course with no prerequisites titled “Global Music History.” For purposes of the course, I approach global music history as the study of past societies’ musicking (including their sound artistry, movement, materialities, and philosophies) as it has been caught up in larger-scale connective processes. In fact, one of the first classes introduces students to global music history as both “an object of study and a particular way of looking at” the past, adapting the definition in Sebastian Conrad’s introductory study, *What Is Global History?*1

Thus, the course is not meant to be “comprehensive,” either chronologically or geographically, nor is it a history of “world music,” as they might expect in a world music course. Instead, I’ve organized it topically, highlighting connective historical processes (such as imperial conquest, revolution, diaspora, and transnational trade) and cultural practices that have recurred across geographically distant societies (such as arts patronage and pilgrimage).

Students gain a knowledge of how musicking has been involved in major historical processes and changes worldwide, even as they develop a more granular understanding of these large-scale processes by approaching them through case studies of individuals or smaller groups, musical practices, or instruments. For example, we discuss nineteenth-century mass migration from East Asia in the context of Japanese migrants’ holehole bushi songs (based on Franklin Odo’s research). These are orally transmitted folksongs whose lyrics speak to migrants’ reasons for leaving home, gendered differences in their experiences, and the harsh work conditions on Hawai’ian sugar plantations.

The course also orients students to several key concepts in global music history and world history that we return to across the course. One of these is “interconnection,” which I illustrate with the history of the oud. Students like

exploring Rachel Beckles Willson’s *Oud Migrations* website in this unit, and it is a reliable “eureka moment” when they link this concept to the oud’s astonishing mobility and influence. They also respond well to the emphasis on instruments and media across the syllabus, as in units on the industrialized piano and pianola, the African diasporic banjo, and the gramophone. Instruments especially help students grasp the seemingly abstract concepts and processes we study, by grounding them in material reality.

The focus of most class meetings is on primary sources such as readings, recordings, images, and oral histories, which we explore through a targeted question that students normally discuss in small peer groups (these questions are listed on the syllabus). I also ask students to respond to one question per week in an online post, either in writing or in a posted video. Based on student feedback, framing discussion questions and offering multiple modalities for responding to them makes the course more accessible and engaging. Another successful tactic is limiting the number of units and spending more time on each one.

Emphasizing primary materials gives students basic skills for doing music historical research and historically informed work of many kinds. For instance, they work with historical recordings, travel writings, visual and print materials, and manuscripts from several scribal traditions (e.g., Catalan, Mughal, Nahua, and Ottoman). As this suggests, students work across a long timeframe and multiple geographies, as well as a variety of sound materials, media, and languages in translation. That range is broader than in most music history and world music courses, and it challenges students to engage past societies in terms closer to their own. With the syllabus’s critical emphasis on liberation and justice struggles and my efforts to practice an intersectional queer feminist pedagogy, its geocultural and linguistic range aspires to make the music history classroom a more welcoming place, especially for BIPOC and foreign-born students.

**SYLLABUS**

*Week 1: Introduction: Connected Music Histories*

*Meeting 1: Introduction*

- *Travels of the Lute*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHKpef2j-7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHKpef2j-7s)
**Meeting 2: Connected Music Histories: The Case of the Oud**

**Reading:**

- Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History*, Introduction
- Rachel Beckles Willson’s blog, *Oudmigrations*, [https://oudmigrations.com/2016/02/29/about/](https://oudmigrations.com/2016/02/29/about/)

**Listening:**


**Week 1 Discussion Question:**

- How does the oud's long history demonstrate interconnection, as Conrad defines the concept?

---

**Medieval Period (c. 800-1500 CE)**

**Week 2: Pilgrimage**

**Meeting 1: The Muslim Hajj to Mecca**

**Reading:**

- Merry Wiesner-Hanks et al., *A History of World Societies (HWS)*, 12th ed., Concise ed., Ch. 9 (“The Islamic World, 600–1400”):
  - “The Expansion of Islam,” 238–44
- Philip Bohlman, “Pilgrimage,” *New Grove Online*
Viewing:
• Tahera Ahmad’s recitation of the Qur’an, Washington, D.C., Annual ISNA Convention, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJ05yNYmFrk

Meeting 2: Christian Pilgrimage in Andalusia
Reading:
• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 6 (“The World of Rome, ca. 1000 B.C.E.–400 C.E.”):
  • “The Coming of Christianity,” 162–65
• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 9 (“The Islamic World, 600–1400”):
  • “Trade and Cross-Cultural Interactions,” 257–59
• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 14 (“Europe and West Asia in the Middle Ages”):
  • “The Christian Church,” 397–400
  • “The Crusades,” 400–02

Listening:
• (Spotify) The Cantigas de Santa María
  • No. 26 (“Non é gran cousa se sabe”), perf. Ensemble Amadis (2010)
  • No. 328 (“Sabor à Santa Maria”), perf. Musica Antigua (2000)

Week 2 Discussion Questions:
• According to Ibn Jubayr, how did Qur’anic recitation sound in 12th-century Mecca, and what were its effects on Muslim pilgrims?
• Why might Alfonso X have commissioned songs (cantigas) about the new Christian pilgrimage shrine at Alcante/El Puerto de Santa María?

Week 3: Traveling in the Islamic World
Meeting 1: Sights and Sounds Along a Caravan Route
Reading:
• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 9 (“The Islamic World, 600–1400”):
  • “Trade and Cross-Cultural Interactions,” 255–27

**Meeting 2: Ibn Battuta Visits Mali**

**Reading:**

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 10 (“African Societies and Kingdoms, 1000 BCE–1500 CE”):
  • “The Trans-Saharan Trade,” 271–75
  • “African Kingdoms and Empires, ca. 800–1500”:
  • “The Kingdom of Mali, ca. 1200–1450,” 278–81
• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 16 (“The Acceleration of Global Contact, 1450–1600”):
  • “The Afro-Eurasian Trade World,” 458–59

**Viewing:**

• Selections from the *Epic of Sundiata*, perf. Hawa Kassé Mady Diabaté and Fodé Lassana Diabaté, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOS78ul1_rA

**Week 3 Discussion Question:**
• How did the Rifa’i order of Sufis seek to achieve a state of religious ecstasy in the ritual Battuta attended in southern Iraq?
• What was the political significance of the praise singing and other musical performance that Ibn Battuta witnessed at the court of Mansa Suleyman in Mali?

Early Modern Period (1500–1800 CE)

Week 4: Dynastic Patronage

Meeting 1: The Medicis of Florence

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 15 ("Europe in the Renaissance and Reformation, 1350–1600"):  “Renaissance Culture,” 424–27
  “Politics and the State in the Renaissance,” 433
• Donna G. Cardamone, “Isabella Medici-Orsini: A Portrait of Self-Affirmation,” in Gender, Sexuality, and Early Music, ed. Todd Borgerding, 1–26

Listening:

• (Spotify) Maddalena Casulana, “Morir, non può,” perf. Singer Pur (2021)

Meeting 2: The Mughal Empire: Akbar the Great

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 17 ("The Islamic World Powers, 1300–1800"):  “The Islamic Empires: The Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals,” 497–99
  “Cultural Flowering,” 502–05


**Viewing:**

• Dhrupad on Raag Ahir Bhairav, performance-lecture by Pandit Uday Bhawalkar, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8kK2DW5bRw

**Week 4 Discussion Questions:**

• How did Maddalena Casulana represent women's patronage and artistry in her dedication to Isabella de'Medici Orsini, and what can that tell us about gender roles in early modern Tuscany?

• How did Akbar the Great's artists use music iconography to represent the Mughal ideal of cultural synthesis?

**Week 5: Imperial Conquest**

**Meeting 1: The Ottoman Conquest of Constantinople/Istanbul**

**Reading:**

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 17 (“The Islamic World Powers, 1300–1800”):
  • “The Islamic Empires: The Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals,” 491–95

• Cem Behar, “Music and Musicians in the City,” in *A Companion to Early Modern Istanbul*, ed. Shirine Hamadeh and Çiğdem Kafescioğlu, 634–54

• Michael Angold, *The Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans* (2014), Ch. 4 (“The Western Reaction”)


• Guillaume Dufay, “Letter to Piero and Giovanni de’ Medici (1456?),” in *Strunk’s Source Readings*

Listening:

• (Spotify) Taksim and Makam: *Uzzâl Uşûleş Devr-I Kebîr*, Dimitri Cantemir Manuscripts (118), perf. Hespèrion XXI (2009)

*Meeting 2: The Spanish Conquest of Tenochtitlán/Mexico City*

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 11, “The Americas, to 1500 CE”:
  • “The Aztec Empire,” 316–22
  • “American Empires and the Encounter,” 322–23
• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 16 (“The Acceleration of Global Contact, 1450–1600”):
  • “The European Voyages of Discovery,” 460–68
  • “Conquest and Settlement,” 469–75
  • “Changing Attitudes and Beliefs,” 480–85
• Robert Stevenson, *Music in Aztec & Inca Territory*, Ch. 3 (“Acculturation: The Colonial Phase”), 204–20
  • Note: Stevenson attributed “Dios itlaçonâtzine” to Don Hernando Franco, which has since been revised. See Eloy Cruz, “De cómo una letra hace la diferencia. Las obras en Náhuatl atribuidas a Don Hernando Franco,” *Estudios De Cultura Náhuatl* 32 (2009), https://nahua1.historicas.unam.mx/index.php/ecn/article/view/9256; and Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell, *Playing in the Cathedral: Music, Race, and Status in New Spain* (2016), Ch. 1 (“Studying Music Culture in New Spain”)
Listening:

- (Spotify) “Dios itlaçonâtzine cemicac ichpochtle,” from the Valdés Codex

Week 5 Discussion Questions:

- How did Guillaume Dufay’s lament portray Western European Christians’ response to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople?
- What can Nahuatl-texted songs in a European style tell us about how Mexica/Aztec musicians adapted to the conquest?

Week 6: The Black Atlantic Diaspora
Meeting 1: The Banjo in the Black Circum-Caribbean
Reading:

- Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 16 (“The Acceleration of Global Contact, 1450–1600”):
  - “The Era of Global Contact,” 476–77
- Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 20, “Africa and the World, 1400–1800”:
- Hans Sloane, Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers, and Jamaica (1707), excerpts with musical reconstruction at Musical Passage, http://www.musicalpassage.org/#explore

Viewing:

- Daniel Laemouahuma Jatta demonstrates the akonting, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzt0v9roU6g

Meeting 2: Contemporary Black Banjo Reclamation
Reading:


Viewing:

• Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, “Polka on the Banjo,” Sept. 1961 NBC News broadcast, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQ2cmyTnTNc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQ2cmyTnTNc)
• Rhiannon Giddens on the minstrel banjo and its music, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7SWUCpHme8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7SWUCpHme8)
• Our Native Daughters on the Black banjo tradition, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG1sRvFDnU0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG1sRvFDnU0)

Listening:


Week 6 Discussion Questions:

• What is a diaspora, and how is the banjo an African diasporic instrument?
• How did the banjo become “whitewashed,” and how are contemporary African American musicians working to reclaim and revive Black banjo traditions?

**Week 7: Diplomacy**

*Meeting 1: Diplomacy Between Siam and France*

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 18, pp. 528–35, 542–45
• *Sout chai*, as transcribed by Nicholas Gervaise
Meeting 2: Wampum Diplomacy in the Seven Years’ War

Reading:

- Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 22 (“Revolutions in the Atlantic World, 1775–1825”):
  - “Background to Revolution,” 656

Viewing:


Listening:


Week 7 Discussion Question:

- How was music involved in 17th-century Siamese and French diplomatic protocols?
- What is wampum diplomacy, and what did Indigenous diplomats’ singing and the “shout” do in their treaty negotiations with colonial agents?

Week 8: Eighteenth-Century Revolutions

Meeting 1: The French Revolution

Reading:

- Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 22 (“Revolutions in the Atlantic World, 1775–1825”):
  - “Revolution in France, 1789–1799,” 661–69
• “The Marseille Hymn in French and English” (Philadelphia, 1793), https://www.loc.gov/item/2015563346

Listening:

• (Spotify) Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, “La Marseillaise”

Meeting 2: The Haitian Revolution

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 22 (“Revolutions in the Atlantic World, 1775–1825”):
  • “The Haitian Revolution, 1791–1804,” 673–78
• Martin Munro, Different Drummers: Rhythm and Race in the Americas (2010), 28–34

Viewing:


Week 8 Discussion Questions:

• How did the song “La Marseillaise” become involved in the French Revolution, and how did the song’s social meanings change when it was adapted for Philadelphia?
How did Black revolutionaries in Haiti use music and dance in their struggle against French colonial forces?

The Modern Period (1800-Present)

Week 9: Focus on Instruments: The Piano in the Industrial Era
Meeting 1: Industrialization of the Piano in Britain and the United States

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 23 (“The Revolution in Energy and Industry, 1760–1850”):
  • “The Industrial Revolution in Britain,” 692–94
• Susie L. Steinbach, Understanding the Victorians, 3rd edition (2023), “‘Playing on the Piano-forte’: Introduction”

Viewing:

• “The Making of a Steinway (1929),” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEnuMbyw1eE

Meeting 2: Player Pianos in Latin America

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 23 (“The Revolution in Energy and Industry, 1760–1850”)
  • “Industrialization in Europe and the World,” 701–2
  • “The Global Picture,” 705–8
• Sergio Ospina Romero, “Ghosts in the Machine and Other Tales around a ‘Marvelous Invention’: Player Pianos in Latin America in the Early Twentieth Century,” JAMS 72, no. 1 (2019)

Listening:

• “El Choclo,” played on a 1919 Pease player piano, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSgsa0BjdJE

Week 9 Discussion Questions:

• How did industrialization affect piano production and consumption in Britain?
• According to Sergio Ospina Romero, how did people in Latin American countries respond to imported player pianos and piano rolls, and how did they eventually achieve “cultural legitimacy”?

Week 10: Pacific Ocean Encounters

Meeting 1: Focus on Individuals: Liliʻuokalani, Composer and Queen

Reading:

• Liliʻuokalani, Hawaiʻiʻs Story by Hawaiʻiʻs Queen (1898), Ch. 5
• Noenoe K. Silva, Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism (2004), Ch. 5 (“The Queen of Hawaiʻi Raises Her Solemn Note of Protest”)

Listening:

• (Spotify) Liliʻuokalani, “He mele lāhui Hawaiʻi” and “Alohaʻoe,” perf. The Rose Ensemble (2014)

Meeting 2: Japanese Migration to Hawai‘i

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 26 (“Asia and the Pacific in the Era of Imperialism, 1800-1914”):
  • “Japan’s Rapid Transformation,” 805–11
  • “The Pacific Region and the Movement of People,” 811–15
• Franklin Odo, *Voices from the Canefields: Folksongs from Japanese Immigrant Workers in Hawai‘i* (2013)

Viewing:

• Franklin Odo, lecture on *Voices from the Canefields*, Library of Congress, Sept. 20, 2013, [https://www.loc.gov/item/webcast-6174](https://www.loc.gov/item/webcast-6174)

Week 10 Discussion Questions:

• How did Lili‘uokalani use her music to protest her imprisonment and the U.S. overthrow of the Hawai‘ian monarchy?
• What did holehole bushi songs communicate about Japanese migrant workers’ attitudes and experiences in Hawai‘i?

Week 11: Liberation Struggles

Meeting 1: Protesting South African Apartheid

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 31 (“Decolonization, Revolution, and the Cold War, 1945–1968”):
  • “Decolonization in Africa,” 987–88
• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 32 (“Liberalization and Liberation, 1968–2000s”):
  • “Resistance to White Rule in Southern Africa,” 1021–24

Listening and Viewing:

• Enoch Sontonga, *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*, perf. Sol T. Plaatje and Sylvia Colenso (rec. 1923), [https://samap.ukzn.ac.za/nkosi-sikelel-i-afrika-0](https://samap.ukzn.ac.za/nkosi-sikelel-i-afrika-0)
• “Lana Crowster Sings the South African National Anthem,” Newlands Rugby Stadium, Cape Town, South Africa, June 11, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aematQqtbmI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aematQqtbmI)
Meeting 2: Decolonizing the Ear
Reading:

- Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 31 (“Decolonization, Revolution, and the Cold War, 1945–1968”):
  - “Nation Building in South Asia and the Middle East,” 978–79

Listening:

- “Egmaay ya Misr!” perf. Umm Kulthum (1926) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqh3ywO0vfY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqh3ywO0vfY)
- (Spotify) “Wewe Paka,” perf. Siti Binti Saad (1930)

Week 11 Discussion Questions:

- Why did Enoch Sontonga compose *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*, and how did the song come to symbolize Black South Africans’ struggles against Apartheid?
- According to Michael Denning, how did the commercial recording of vernacular musics in the 1920s and 1930s contribute to decolonization movements?

Week 12: Commemorating Two World Wars
Meeting 1: English Artists Respond to the First World War
Reading:

- Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 28 (“World War and Revolution, 1914–1929”):
  - “The First World War, 1914–1918,” 858–66
  - “The Home Front,” 867–72
- Vera Brittain, “The German Ward,” [http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/1745](http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/1745)
- Wilfred Owen, “Anthem for Doomed Youth,” [http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/3290](http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/3290)

Listening:

• (Spotify) “Gas Shells Bombardment, Lille, 1918”

Meeting 2: Focus on Individuals: Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 30 (“The Great Depression and World War II, 1929–1945”):
• Wilfred Owen, “Futility,” http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/3308

Listening:

• (Spotify) Benjamin Britten, War Requiem, “Lacrimosa” and “Move Him Gently” sections of the Dies irae (NDR Sinfonieorchester, 1992/2001)

Week 12 Discussion Questions:

• What aspects of Edward Elgar’s song, “For the Fallen,” suggest an imperialist perspective on Britain’s role in WWI?
• How does Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem comment on WWII and its aftermath?

Week 13: Postwar Decolonization

Meeting 1: Jazz in International Black Anti-Imperialism

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., HWS, Ch. 31 (“Decolonization, Revolution, and the Cold War, 1945–1968”):
  • “The World Remade,” 968–71

Listening:

• (Spotify) “Heebie Jeebies,” perf. Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five (1926)
• (Spotify) Dizzie Gillespie and Charlie Parker, “Shaw ’Nuff,” perf. Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Quintette (1945)

*Meeting 2: Focus on Individuals; Frantz Fanon on Jazz*

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 31 ("Decolonization, Revolution, and the Cold War, 1945–1968”):
  • “The World Remade,” 974–76
• Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), 170–77

Week 13 Discussion Questions:

• What did jazz and the blues represent in Léopold Sédar Senghor’s theory of Négritude?
• Why did Frantz Fanon advocate “modern jazz,” or bebop, over older, blues-based jazz idioms?

*Week 14: Indigenous Resurgence*

*Meeting 1: Anishinaabe Songs for Water Protection*

Reading:

• Wiesner-Hanks et al., *HWS*, Ch. 33 ("The Contemporary World in Historical Perspective”):
  • “Social Movements,” 1064–65
  • “Global Climate Change,” 1065–72
• Violet Caibaisai, “Water Walk Pedagogy,” in *Downstream, Reimagining Water*, ed. Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong (Content warning: discussion of sexual assault)


Viewing and Listening:

• *Future History* (dir. Jennifer Podemski), Season 1, Episode 4: “Water,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H58D259s_7k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H58D259s_7k)


*Meeting 2: Dam Histories and Water Futures*

Reading:


Viewing and Listening:

• (Spotify) Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “She Sang Them Home,” spoken word (Ch. 55–56 on Spotify)


*Week 14 Discussion Questions:*

• Why have Anishinaabek Water Walkers sung prayers to the water on their Water Walks?
How does Simpson and Dirksen's performance of “She Sang Them Home” / *War Cry Movement I* envision life after the removal of the dam on the Otonabee River?