Course Title; Fall, 2025

"Sweet Harmony: Great vocal groups 1950-1980"

One could say that the story of popular music is one of great singers--but it is also the story of great vocal groups. In this course we will take a trip through six different eras and genres. In this new course we will examine in depth 24 legendary singing groups, from the days of doo-wop through the pop era; stars whose power, style, and passion gave us unforgettable records. We will also listen and watch songs from other singing groups who will be remembered for that one huge hit which still resonates to this day. With a nod to choral harmonies, unique vocal arrangements and unmistakable and unforgettable trademark songs, this fun course promises to be much more than a trip down Memory Lane.

I'd like to add an accompanying note to this course outline. The pandemic forced us to make adjustments to how we offer our courses. Since then all of us here at OLLI have strived to improve the zoom—and live—experience for all of our wonderful students. When we went live we continued to offer the zoom classes, and it has worked out well.

That said, there is no substitute for being at the Freight, to hear the great music played on the terrific sound system, to see the video clips on the big screen, and have that special communal experience.

I understand that for many of you this is not an option, or it is a difficult one, with traffic, parking and other concerns. And we very much appreciate that you are with us on zoom. But if you are planning on taking this course and you are undecided, please consider how rewarding the live experience is.

Best,

Pete

Sweet Harmony Course Outline by Week:

week one 1950-1960 gospel and doo-wop groups

Soul Stirrers
Dixie Hummingbirds
Flamingos
Platters
Jordanaires

week two 1950's and 60's male R&B groups

Little Anthony and the Imperials
Coasters
Dion and the Belmonts

week three 1960's female pop/rock "girl" groups

Ronettes
Shirelles
Crystals
Chiffons

week four 1960's pop/rock male groups

Drifters
Isley brothers
Four Seasons
Righteous Brothers

week five 1960's and 70's pop/R&B female and mixed gender groups

Staple Singers
Mamas and Papas
5th Dimension
Pointer Sisters

week six 1960's and 70's pop-rock/R&B (male)

Impressions
Spinners
Stylistics
O'Jays

Suggested reading, viewing and listening (for entire course)

Reading:

People Get Ready! A New History of Black Gospel Music, by Robert Darden
A City Called Heaven: Chicago and the Birth of Gospel Music by Robert Marovich
Doo-Wop: The Forgotten Third of Rock 'N Roll by Anthony Gribin/Matthew Schiff

The Doo-Wop Decades, 1945-1965: A Resource Guide to Vocal Groups and their Recordings by B. Lee Cooper and Frank W. Hoffmann
Lonely Avenue: The Unlikely Life and Times of Doc Pomus by Alex Halberstadt and Peter Guralnick
Always Magic in the Air: Bomp and Brilliance of the Brill Building Ken Emerson
He's a Rebel: Phil Spector--Rock and Roll's Legendary Producer, Mark Ribowsky
Leaders of the Pack: Girl Groups of the 1960s and Their Influence on Popular Culture in Britain and America by Sean MacLeod
Jersey Boys: The Story of Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons by David Cote
California Dreamin': The True Story of the Mamas and the Papas: The Music, the Madness, the Magic that was by Michelle Phillips
The Gospel According to Mavis Staples, July 4 2022 New Yorker, David Remnick
A House on Fire: The Rise and Fall of Philadelphia Soul by John Jackson

Viewing:

Streetlight Harmonies, 2020, a documentary by Brent Wilson
20 Feet from Stardom, 2013 by Morgan Neville
Monterey Pop, 1968 by D. A. Pennebaker
Wattstax, 1973, by Mel Stuart
Jersey Boys, 2014 by Clint Eastwood
The Sound of Philadelphia, Warner Brothers, coming in 2023

Listening: "Greatest Hits" compilation by any/all of these groups:

Soul Stirrers
Dixie Hummingbirds
Flamingos
Platters
Ronettes
Shirelles
Drifters
Isley brothers
Staple Singers
Mamas and Papas
Impressions
Spinners
Jordanaires
Little Anthony and the Imperials
Coasters
Dion and the Belmonts
Crystals
Chiffons
Four Seasons
Righteous Brothers
5th Dimension
Pointer Sisters
Stylistics
O'Jays

In-class playlist for each week:

week one:

Soul Stirrers

He’s been a shelter for me
I’m a soldier
Jesus gave me Water
Were you there
Touch the Hem of his Garment

Dixie Hummingbirds

The Final Edition, 1959
Maybe It’s You
Bedside of a Neighbor
In the Morning
Loves me like a rock

Platters

Only you
The great pretender
Twilight time
Smoke gets in your eyes

Flamingos

I’ll be home
I Only have eyes for you
Jump Children 1959

Jordanaires

Don’t Be cruel--Elvis
Return to Sender— Elvis
Poor Little Fool—Ricky Nelson
Fall to Pieces—Patsy Cline

week two:

The Coasters

Searchin'
Yakety yak
Charlie Brown
Along came Jones
Poison Ivy

Little Anthony and the Imperials

Tears on my Pillow
Shimmy Shimmy Coco pop
Anthony remembers
Hurt so bad 1964
Goin’ Out of my head

Dion
Teenager in love
The Wanderer, 1960,
Runaround sue, 1960
Ruby Baby
Abraham Martin and John 1968,
Others
Frankie Lyman and the teenagers--Why do fools Fall in Love
Cadillacs—Speedoo
Five Satins—in the still of the night
The Diamonds—little darlin'
The Rays—Silhouettes
Maurice Williams and Zodiacs—Stay
Dovells—Bristol Stomp

week three:

Ronettes
Baby I Love You
Be My Baby
Walkin' in the Rain
The Best Part of Breaking Up
Sleigh Ride
Shirelles
Dedicated to the one I love
soldier boy
boys
Will you still love me tomorrow
I met him on a Sunday
Crystals
There's no other like my baby
He's sure the boy I love
Uptown
He's a rebel
Da Doo Ron Ron
Then He kissed me
Chiffons
Sweet talkin' guy
He's so fine
One Fine Day

My boyfriend's back
Others
Chains --the Cookies
Tell him --the Exciters
Mr. Lee--the Bobbettes
Chapel of Love --the Dixie Cups

week four:

Drifters
This Magic Moment
On Broadway
Under the Boardwalk
Save the Last Dance for Me
There goes my baby
Up on the Roof
Isley Brothers
Shout
Twist and Shout
This Old Heart of Mine
It's your Thing
Four Seasons—1962-66
Dawn
Big Girls Don't Cry
Sherry
Walk like a Man
Ragdoll
Righteous Brothers
Little Latin Lupe Lu
You've Lost that Lovin' Feelin'
Soul and Inspiration
Unchained Melody
Time of My Life
Others
Jay and the Americans--Come a Little Bit Closer-- **video**
Tokens—Lion Sleeps Tonight
Vogues—5 o'clock world
Archie Bell& the Drells—Tighten Up

week five:

Staple Singers
Heavy makes you happy
Respect Yourself
I'll Take you There
If you're ready, come go with me
The Weight, from The Last Waltz

Mamas and Papas
Go Where you Wanna Go
California Dreamin'
Monday Monday
I call your name by John Lennon
Dedicated to the one I love, 1967
12:30

Fifth Dimension
Up, up and Away
Stoned Soul Picnic
Age of Aquarius/Let the Sun Shine in
Wedding Bell Blues
One less bell to answer

Pointer Sisters
Yes we can can
Fire
He's So Shy
Slow Hand
I'm so Excited
Jump

week six:

Impressions
Gypsy Woman
It's all right
Keep on Pushin'
People get ready
Amen

Philadelphia International acts
Delfonics—La la means I love You
Intruders---Cowboys to Girls
Spinners

I'll be around
Could it be I'm falling in love
Mighty Love
Then Came You (with Dionne Warwick)
Rubberband Man
Stylistics
Betcha By Golly Wow
I'm Stone in Love with You
Break up to make up
You make me feel brand new
O'Jays--
Backstabbers
For the love of money
Love Train
Other hits:
Oh girl--Chi-Lites
Everybody plays the fool—Main Ingredient
If you don't know me by now--Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes
Disco Inferno—Tramps