

Syllabus for JIMI HENDRIX/JANIS JOPLIN

Course Description:

Between 1966 and 1970, two rock musicians rose from unlikely origins to superstardom after years of hardship and struggle. Each created explosive, remarkable bodies of work in just four years before dying only weeks apart. Combining a wealth of film and audio clips with expert commentary, “Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin: Psychedelic Trailblazers” celebrates the music and lives of these icons. The first half of the course will focus on Hendrix, from his roots in blues and soul through his transformation into rock’s most creative guitarist with his underrated first-class compositions and engaging vocals. The second half of the course is devoted to Joplin, who underwent her own metamorphosis from scuffling folk-blues beatnik to electrifying singer, forever changing the image of rock’n’roll frontwomen.

Week One: The Roots of Jimi Hendrix

Jimi Hendrix learns guitar while playing in rock’n’roll groups in his high school years in Seattle. After his discharge from the Army in mid-1962, he refines his craft as a guitarist in numerous bands. By mid-1966, however, he becomes determined to lead his own group, singing as well as playing guitar. Moving to London and forming the Jimi Hendrix Experience in late 1966, he rises to stardom with a flurry of British hit singles in the first half of 1967.

Week Two: Hendrix’s Rise to Superstardom

In mid-1967, the Jimi Hendrix Experience’s first album, *Are You Experienced?*, is one of the most stunning debuts in rock history. Comprised mostly of original material, it’s a showcase for his creative guitar work and use of electronic distortion; his quick mastery of the studio as a vehicle for experimentation; and his astonishingly quick maturation as a songwriter and singer. H

He’s a big hit at his first high-profile American concert at the Monterey Pop Festival, where he burns his guitar as a finale.

He consolidates his global stardom with his second album, *Axis: Bold As Love*, released at the end of 1967.

Week Three: *Electric Ladyland* and the End of the Experience

In 1968, with the double LP *Electric Ladyland*, Hendrix records his most ambitious project, the songs ranging from concise covers to sprawling epics. But although *Electric Ladyland* tops the US charts, the original Jimi Hendrix Experience never records another album, breaking up in mid-1969. With personal, legal, and business difficulties mounting, no new albums appear in 1969. In the midst of this instability, he famously closes the Woodstock festival with his rendition of “The Star Spangled Banner.”

Week Four: The Band of Gypsies, and Hendrix’s Death and Legacy

Hendrix forms a new group, the Band of Gypsys, that disbands after a live album. He tours with another lineup of the Experience but dies on September 18, 1970, before he can complete a long-awaited studio album. Countless posthumous albums preserve his legacy as the most enduring influence on rock guitarists.

Week Five: The Roots of Janis Joplin

A rebel from adolescence onward, Joplin begins to sing folk and blues in clubs in Texas and San Francisco. In mid-1966, she switches to rock by joining one of the top early San Francisco psychedelic bands, Big Brother & the Holding Company. She boosts their popularity immensely, and by the beginning of 1967, they're one of the most locally popular San Francisco bands, recording their first album.

Week Six: Monterey and Rise to Superstardom

Big Brother, and particularly Janis, are a big hit at the Monterey Pop Festival in June 1967. Under the guidance of Bob Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman, they sign with Columbia Records. Their second album, *Cheap Thrills*, soars to #1 when it's released in summer 1968, powered by Joplin's explosive vocals on songs like "Piece of My Heart" and "Ball and Chain."

Week Seven: The End of Big Brother and the Kozmic Blues Band

Cheap Thrills is still at the top of the charts when it's announced that Joplin will be going solo. Her new band, the Kozmic Blues Band, goes in a more pronounced soul direction than Big Brother. Although the only album Joplin records with them makes the Top Five, it gets a mixed reception by both audiences and critics. By the end of 1969, the Kozmic Blues Band have broken up, and she has to find a new musical ensemble and direction.

Week Eight: The Full Tilt Boogie Band and Final Year

In early 1970, Joplin forms another group, the Full Tilt Boogie Band. In the summer and early fall, they record *Pearl*, which combines blues, rock, soul, and some ventures into broader territory like country, as well as hinting at a development of Joplin as a songwriter. But on October 4, 1970, Joplin is found dead of a heroin overdose in a Los Angeles hotel room. Issued at the beginning of 1971, *Pearl* makes #1. So does the single "Me and Bobby McGee," Joplin not living to see the release of her biggest hit.