

OLLI Winter session, 2018

Instructor: Pete Elman

Course Title: "**It's All About the Song**"

Sub-title: "**The Mount Olympus of American pop-rock songwriters**"

**Course description and bio:**

The essence of popular music is the song; whether it is folk, pop, rock, rhythm and blues or country, the song is the core of the popular record. This course examines the lives and work of six great songwriters/artists of the golden era of rock and roll. We will study the contributions of Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, the team of Carole King and Gerry Goffin, Brian Wilson, Paul Simon and Joni Mitchell.

**Class description:** The course will be broken up chronologically, focusing on one songwriter each week. Each session will include:

- A thorough, background lecture about each composer, including the musical style most associated with them and stories, sometimes primary source.
- A slide show with photographs, charts, maps and information on each composer.
- In depth analysis of select lyrics from songs by each songwriter
- Audio high-quality CD versions of songs
- High quality DVD film clips and/or select youtube clips, of each songwriter or others artists performing that songwriter's material.
- A live music component, where the instructor will demonstrate on piano and guitar melodic and arrangement aspects of the songs that will help illustrate the writing style unique to each composer. The instructor will perform--often with special guests----songs by each composer.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**Week 1: Chuck Berry.** He was rock & roll's first singer-songwriter, and the music's first guitar hero, as well. "If you gave rock & roll another name, you might call it Chuck Berry." (John Lennon) "His songs were concise and mythic, celebrating uniquely American freedoms or protesting their denial." (Rolling Stone)

**Week 2: Buddy Holly.** Chuck Berry wrote about teenage America. Buddy Holly, the other great rock & roll singer-songwriter of the Fifties, embodied it. Holly was one of the first rock & roll singers to write his own material, exerting a huge influence on the Beatles and Rolling Stones, among countless others.

**Week 3: Carole King and Gerry Goffin.** Goffin and King were pop's most prolific songwriting partnership –and, even more impressively, they kept their winning streaks going even after their marriage split up. With King handling melodies and Goffin the lyrics, they wrote many of pop music's most evocative songs, tender snapshots of the adolescent experience. "When Paul and I first got together, we wanted to be the British Goffin and King," (John Lennon).

**Week 4: Brian Wilson.** The Beach Boy's musical director wrote gloriously ecstatic California anthems, rock & roll's greatest odes to idyllic summertime freedom. But he also penned darkly introspective masterpieces as well as groundbreaking symphonic masterpieces. His resiliency in the face of tremendous challenges has been an inspiration.

**Week 5: Paul Simon.** The quintessential New York singer-songwriter, he switched between styles effortlessly with as much attention to rhythm as melody. Over the decades, his music has incorporated Tin Pan Alley styles, world music, acoustic reveries, gospel, R&B and electronic music, all without diluting his core appeal as an eloquent chronicler of everyday alienation.

**Week 6: Joni Mitchell.** Never a pure folkie, she started out banging on her acoustic guitar in innovative ways and tunings, moved to playing sophisticated melodies at the piano, all the while unfurling starkly personal lyrics that pushed beyond traditional songwriting towards intimacy and rawness. Mitchell's run of albums in the early 1970's, on which she perfected a jazzy form of pop, rival any streak of record-making in pop history, and her lyrical depictions of being a strong woman offered a unique look at the era.

*\* suggested reading, listening, and viewing:*

**Week 1: Chuck Berry**

**Reading:**

*Chuck Berry: the Autobiography (2001)*

*Brown Eyed Handsome Man: The Life and Hard Times of Chuck Berry*, by Bruce Pegg, (2002)

**Listening:**

*The Great Twenty-Eight, Chuck Berry*, (Chess, 1982)

*Chuck Berry Is On Top (Chess, 1959)*

*St. Louis to Liverpool (Chess, 1964)*

**Viewing:**

*The Tami Show (1964)*

*Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' roll, Chuck Berry with Keith Richard*, (1987)

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**Week 2: Buddy Holly:**

**Reading:**

*Remembering Buddy: The Definitive Biography Of Buddy Holly (2001)*

*by John Goldrosen and John Beecher*

*The Day The Music Died: The Last Tour Of Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, And Richie Valens*

*2003 by Larry Lehmer*

**Listening:**

*20 Golden Greats, Buddy Holly and the Crickets (EMI, 1978)*

*Memorial Collection 2009 (Decca, Geffen)*

**Viewing:**

*The Buddy Holly Story, dir. by Steve Rash (1978)*

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**Week 3: Carole King and Gerry Goffin**

**Reading:**

*Always Magic in the Air: The Bomp and Brilliance of the Brill Building Era*, by Ken Emerson (2005)

*A Natural Woman: A Memoir: Carole King (2012)*

**Listening:**

*Pearls: Songs of Goffin and King, by Carole King 1980 Capitol Records*

*Tapestry, 1970 by Carole King*

*Beautiful; the soundtrack from the Broadway musical, songs of Goffin and King (2012)*

**Viewing:**

*About Carole King: Natural Woman; American masters, PBS (2016)*

*Troubadours: Carole King / James Taylor & The Rise of the Singer-Songwriter: PBS (2011)*

*Tapestry: Live In Hyde Park DVD 2016*

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#### **Week 4: Brian Wilson**

##### **Reading:**

*Catch a Wave: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson* by Peter Ames Carlin (2007)

*The Nearest Faraway Place*, Timothy White, 1996

##### **Listening:**

*Summer Days (And Summer Nights!!)* The Beach Boys, (Capitol, 1965)

*Pet Sounds*, The Beach Boys (1966)

*Smiley Smile*, The Beach Boys (1969)

*Sail on Sail on Sailor*, the Beach Boys

##### **Viewing:**

*The TAMI show*, 1964

*Love and Mercy* (feature film, 2014)

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#### **Week 5: Paul Simon:**

##### **Reading:**

*Simon and Garfunkel: The Biography* by Victoria Kingston

##### **Listening:**

*Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* (1964)

*Sounds of Silence* (1966)

*Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* (1966)

*Bookends*(1968)

*Bridge over Troubled Water* (1970)

*There Goes Rhymin' Simon*, 1973

*Still Crazy after all These Years* 1975

*Graceland* 1986

##### **Viewing:**

*Rock Hall of Fame 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert*, 2009

*Concert in Central Park*, DVD, 1982

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#### **Week 6: Joni Mitchell:**

##### **Reading:**

*Joni Mitchell: In Her Own Words*, by Malka Marom (2014)

*Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon--and the Journey of a Generation*, by Sheila Weller, 2009

##### **Listening:**

*Clouds* (1969)

*Ladies of the Canyon* (1970)

*Blue* (1971)

*For the Roses* (1972)

*Court and Spark* (1974)

*The Hissing of Summer Lawns* (1975)

##### **Viewing:**

*The Last Waltz*, 1977

1991 Joni Mitchell VHI interview