

## **MUR 145: High Voltage—Heavy Metal Music and its History**

Spring 2013 course syllabus



TR 11:05am-12:25pm  
Gavett Hall room 208  
4.0 credits, CRN # 77642

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### **Office Hours**

Tuesdays 2-3pm; Fridays 11am-12pm; or by appointment.

### **Course Description**

Behind the screaming guitars, thundering pulse, and soaring vocals of heavy metal music lies an impressive history of censorship, rebellion, and redemption. In this course, students will study both the musical structure and the fascinating social/cultural history of hard rock and metal through reading, listening, discussion, and analysis. Over 40 years of hard rock and metal trends will be discussed-- Sabbath to Stryper to Slipknot-- and several guest musicians and lecturers will complement the course materials with performances and anecdotes. Students will demonstrate their knowledge through listening quizzes, writing/homework assignments, and a comprehensive final project. No prerequisites.

### **Course Objectives**

The student will be able to:

- Intelligently address the essential questions “what is heavy metal?,” “where did it come from?,” “how does it work?,” “why should I care?”
- Begin to define the separation between “rock,” “hard rock,” and “heavy metal,” and aurally differentiate between the various subgenres within these classifications.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the myriad political/social/economic/cultural factors that forged heavy metal, and that have affected it in positive and negative ways.
- Develop an aural awareness of the changing sound of metal over time.
- Analyze metal songs and break them down into definable elements (rhythm, melody, etc.).
- Think critically about heavy metal lyrics and situate them among the two thematic poles of chaos and ecstasy.
- Experience, describe, and critically write about the live metal concert experience.
- Trace the metal experience through three distinct phases: 1) formation of the band and creation of the music; 2) delivery of the music via the metal concert experience and the music industry; 3) consumption of the music by the audience and critics.
- Engage in volitional learning activities based upon his or her particular interests within this genre of music.
- Bang his/her head.

### **Attendance Policy**

This course will be taught in a quasi-seminar format, requiring the students’ full participation. Thus, attendance in class is absolutely essential. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class period. Students are allowed two (2) absences, excused or unexcused, with no effect on course grade. Any additional absences may negatively affect a student’s final grade. For instance, a student with three or more absences will not receive the generosity of “rounding up” of the final course grade. Planned absences must be approved by the instructor via e-mail at least 48 hours in advance of the missed

session. In the case of a medical or family emergency, notification after the missed session is acceptable. Extended absence due to medical reasons may require written justification from a physician.

You and/or your family are paying the tuition—make the most of your time here and come to class!

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

Please carefully read the University policy on academic integrity at:

<http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>

Cheating or plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated!

### **Important for you to know...**

1. Please don't arrive late to class. It's annoying. Also, no texting or use of wireless phones/mp3 players, as this drives me crazy! You may use a laptop computer to take notes if you wish, but please don't browse the web or IM friends during "slow" periods in class. (If you're tempted to do it, don't bring your laptop!)
2. If you frequently skip class for unapproved reasons, there is little I can do to get you caught up. I will do everything within my power to help you master the material AS LONG AS you do your part and show up every day.
3. Homework assignments and projects will be dropped one letter grade for every day that they are late. After two class sessions have passed, the homework will not be accepted. All graded homework assignments need to be posted to Blackboard or, as a last resort, submitted to Sungmin (our TA) BEFORE the class period in which they're due.
4. Consider the "Killer Bs":
  - BE PROMPT- Get here before class begins.
  - BE PREPARED- Come to class ready to learn with your materials and notes for discussion.
  - BE POLITE- Respect everyone's personal rights, property, and opinion.
  - BE ATTENTIVE- Practice active listening skills when the instructor, visitors, or other students are addressing the class.
  - BE COOPERATIVE- Cooperate with your instructor and classmates.
  - BE RESPONSIBLE- Ask for help when you need it. Turn your work in on time. Accept responsibility for your grades and actions.
5. If the instructor determines that a student is not being respectful towards other students, the TA, or the instructor, or is otherwise behaving in an inappropriate manner, it is the instructor's prerogative to remove the student from the class either temporarily or permanently, as the case requires.

### **Required Text (you must purchase this one)**

Christe, I. (2003). *Sound of the beast: The complete headbanging history of heavy metal*. New York: HarperEntertainment.

### Other Books We Will Use (distributed via Blackboard)

- Bayer, G. (ed.) (2009). *Heavy metal music in Britain*. Abingdon: Ashgate. (available online through Rush Rhees Library)
- Danville, E. (2009). *The official heavy metal book of lists*. New York: Backbeat.
- Hagar, S. (2011). *Red: My uncensored life in rock*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Konow, D. (2002). *Bang your head: The rise and fall of heavy metal*. New York: Three Rivers.
- LeVine, M. (2008). *Heavy metal Islam: Rock, resistance, and the struggle for the soul of Islam*. New York: Three Rivers.
- Mudrian, A. (2004). *Choosing death: The improbable history of death metal and grindcore*. Los Angeles: Feral House.
- Newby, C. (2012). *Exceptional savagery: Heavy metal, censorship, and pop culture*. (Free electronically with Amazon Prime account)
- Osbourne, O. (2009). *I am Ozzy*. New York: Grand Central.
- Richards, K. (2010). *Life*. New York: Little, Brown, and Co.
- Waksman, S. (2009). *This ain't the summer of love: Conflict and crossover in heavy metal and punk*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Walser, R. (1993). *Running with the devil: Power, gender, and madness in heavy metal music*. Hanover NH: UP of New England.
- Weinstein, D. (1991). *Heavy metal: A cultural sociology*. New York: Lexington.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2000). *Heavy metal: The music and its culture*. (this is the updated version of the above)
- Wilkinson, P. (2006). *Rat salad: Black Sabbath, the classic years 1969-1975*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Wilson, S. (2010). *Mean deviation: Four decades of progressive heavy metal*. New York: Bazillion Points.

### Articles (distributed via Blackboard)

- Arnett, J. (1991). Adolescents and heavy metal music: From the mouths of metalheads. *Youth Society*, 23(1), 76-98.
- Breen, M. (2006). A stairway to heaven or a highway to hell?: Heavy metal rock music in the 1990s. *Cultural Studies*, 5(2), 191-203.
- Chastagner, C. (2007). *The Parents Music Resource Center: From information to censorship*. Unpublished; available at <http://www.philagora.org/about-the-world/pmrc1.htm>.
- Dee, J. (1994). Subliminal lyrics in heavy metal music: More litigation, anyone? *Communications and the Law*, 3, 3-24.
- Hanlon, K. B. (2006). Heavy metal carnival and dis-alienation: The politics of grotesque realism. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 33-48.

Harrison, L. R. (2010). Factory music: How the industrial geography and working-class environment of post-War Birmingham fostered the birth of heavy metal. *Journal of Social History*, 44(1), 145-158.

Krenske, L. & McKay, J. (2000). 'Hard and heavy': Gender and power in a heavy metal music subculture. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 7(3), 287-304.

Luhr, E. (2005). Metal missionaries to the nation: Christian heavy metal music, "family values," and youth culture. *American Quarterly*, 57(1), 103-128.

Parker, J. (2011). How heavy metal is keeping us sane. *The Atlantic* magazine, May 2011.

Rafalovich, A. (2006). Broken and becoming God-sized: Contemporary metal music and masculine individualism. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 19-32.

Took, K. J. & Weiss, D. S. (1994). The relationship between heavy metal and rap music and adolescent turmoil: Real or artifact? *Adolescence*, 29(115), 613-621.

**Film Sources** (some we will view, some will be referenced in passing but are highly recommended)

Barney, S. et. al. (producers), & Gervasi, S. (director). (2008). *Anvil!: The story of Anvil* (motion picture). USA: VH1 Rock Docs.

Berlinger, J. et. al. (producers), & Berlinger, J. & Sinofsky, B. (2004). *Metallica: Some kind of monster* (motion picture). USA: Radical Media.

Berlinger, J. et. al. (producers), & Berlinger, J. & Sinofsky, B. (1996). *Paradise Lost: The child murders at Robin Hood hills* (motion picture). USA: Home Box Office (HBO).

Berry, E. et. al. (producers), & Dunn, S., McFadyen, S., & Wise, J.J. (directors). (2005). *Metal: A headbanger's journey* (motion picture). USA: Seville Pictures.

Dayton, J. & Faris, V. (producers), & Spheeris, P. (director). (1988). *The Decline of Western Civilization II: The metal years* (motion picture). USA: Sony Pictures.

Heyn, J. & Krulik, J. (1986). *Heavy Metal Parking Lot* (motion picture). USA: Film Baby.

McFadyen, S. & Dunn, S. (directors). (2007). *Global Metal*. Canada: Banger Films.

Murphy, K. (producer) & Reiner, R. (director). (1984). *This is Spinal Tap* (motion picture). USA: Spinal Tap Productions.

Parsons, J. (producer), & Carruthers, D. (director). (2006). *Heavy Metal: Louder than life* (motion picture). UK: Metropolis.

Warren, M. J. (director). (2006). *Heavy: The story of metal* (television series). USA: VH1/441 Productions.

Zebub, B. (director). (2011). *Black Metal: The music of Satan*. USA: Bill Zebub Productions.

Zebub, B. (director). (2004). *Death Metal: A documentary*. USA: Bill Zebub Productions.

## **Class Format**

Almost every class session will include open discussion, lecture, audio/video samples, and time to go over homework and prepare for upcoming assignments. Guest speakers, interactive tasks, group work, and student presentations will complement this format. Broadly speaking, we will alternate between *chronological* and *philosophical* material—not just the who, what, and where, but also a deeper and more reflective examination of the socio-cultural underpinnings of this music.

## **Warning: Explicit Lyrics**

Students should not be surprised to learn that some songs—especially in certain metal subgenres—contain mature subject matter involving politics, religion and the occult, sexuality, violence, and criminal activity. In fact, some of the bands we will study have produced some of the most heinous and vile lyrics ever written! These albums and songs do not necessarily reflect the opinions and attitudes of the instructor or the University of Rochester. If you do not think you can handle adult language and themes, it would be best for you to drop the class to avoid being offended.

## **Random Acts of Metal**

At the beginning of some class periods, we will take a few minutes to discuss current events, view funny videos, or otherwise enjoy random musings in the world of hard rock and metal. I encourage you to suggest topics for this lighthearted segment of class.

## **Reading Assignments**

You are expected to read *Sound of the Beast* in its entirety this semester, along with many other articles, book chapters, etc. I will distribute discussion questions for each of the major reading assignments we tackle. The questions will generally consist of either simple fact finding questions that can be answered in a few words, or deeper analysis/critical thinking questions that might require a few sentences. You must be ready to discuss the reading via the discussion questions at each ensuing class meeting, since the “luck of the draw” might put you on the spot! Discussion questions will only occasionally be collected and graded, but your ability to navigate them intelligently will affect your participation/preparation grade.

## **Class Discussion Board**

Consider the amount of time we have in class together (not much) and the amount of great material available to share and enjoy online (a ton!). I have established a class discussion board through Blackboard that we can use to share ideas, pose questions, post links to interesting YouTube videos, and generally spend time together as a community outside of class. This is nothing to obsess over!—I will ask you to post something (anything!) to the discussion board a few times during the semester, but the intent is for it to develop organically in a way that creates an open forum for discussion, debate, and the sharing of knowledge. Entries will not be graded per se, but we will check from time to time to make sure everyone contributes something at least a few times this semester.

## **Listening Assignments—using Grooveshark**

Most if not all of the music you will need to access for this course is available through on-demand streaming at websites like [www.playlist.com](http://www.playlist.com) and [listen.grooveshark.com](http://listen.grooveshark.com). YouTube is another great resource for listening to music and watching vintage music videos/concert footage. Almost every week, a playlist will be assigned that represents the era of hard rock/metal being covered in class. You will need to listen to each song a minimum of three times in order to become familiarized with it fully.

## Listening Quizzes

These are not intended to “trick” you, but rather provide an opportunity for you to demonstrate that: a) you have listened to the assigned playlists; b) you can aurally distinguish between different artists and subgenres; c) you have learned the essential background information pertaining to each song (artist, year, possibly personnel or album title). Listening quizzes will be quick, and will consist of only a portion of the assigned playlist. For instance, if the assigned playlist contains 10 songs, possibly only 3 or 4 would be included in the quiz.

## Song Analysis

Periodically throughout the semester, I will ask you to analyze songs using an assignment template that I will provide. An analysis starts by going to the Grooveshark web site to examine the playlist from a particular era. The idea is to review a *different* song by an artist/group in the playlist, or a song performed by another artist/group that was representative/popular during the same time period. Once you choose a song, listen to it several times, complete the template form, and attach a copy of the lyrics.

## Class Lunch

Although I kindly ask you not to bring your lunch to class (eating can be distracting to others), I would like to facilitate further discussion of music, culture, life, or anything else on your mind, beyond the boundaries of our class sessions. So, let's do lunch! I have reserved an area in the Meliora (Douglass upper level) at 12:30pm on the following dates: **Thurs. Feb. 7, Tues. March 5, Thurs. April 18.** Sign-up instructions will be provided as we get closer to the first lunch, and participation will be limited to the first 10 people who sign up. Please take advantage of this opportunity to get to know your instructors and classmates!

## Guest Speakers

Former members of Anthrax, PsyOpus, and Overkill have already been confirmed. Additional visitors may make themselves available during the semester. Therefore, the schedule is subject to change.

## Concert Experience

We will be attending a heavy metal show at a local venue this semester (a required field trip). Since our textbook is quite inexpensive, I am asking each student to purchase a ticket to the show (likely at a discounted rate—no more than \$40). We will coordinate transportation to and from the venue, and I'll ask you to organize your thoughts in a short write-up after the concert. More details to come!

## Schedule (subject to change at the discretion of the instructor)

\*\*NOTE: Try to do your reading over the weekend so that we can discuss it in class on Tuesdays!

TIMEFRAME	TOPICS	ASSIGNMENTS
week 1; 1/17	<i><b>Hello from the Gutter!</b></i> Introduction to course/overview Syllabus and texts/sources <i>Heavy Metal Parking Lot</i> (1986) What is heavy metal/hard rock?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information sheet</li><li>• Personality test</li><li>• Weinstein Ch. 2</li><li>• Parker article</li><li>• Listening- playlist 1</li></ul>

week 2; 1/22 – 1/24	<p><b><u>UNIT 1: For Those About to Rock...</u></b>  The metal subculture  It all starts with the blues/Roots and the family tree  Basic music theory, the elements of popular music, and the riff  Literary inspiration: mythology, Lovecraft, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walser Ch. 1</li> <li>• Prepare for riff quiz—listen to playlist 2 (riffs)</li> <li>• Harrison “factory music” article</li> <li>• Bayer Ch. 6 (online)</li> <li>• First blog entry</li> </ul>
week 3; 1/29 – 1/31	<p><b>Quiz #1—listening (riffs)</b> on 1/29  The pre-metal scene: 1960s psychedelia  1970s—Black Sabbath  Other “proto-metal” groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOTB prologue/Ch. 1</li> <li>• Wilkinson Ch. 1-2</li> <li>• Leary <i>The Psychedelic Experience</i></li> <li>• Keith Richards excerpt</li> </ul>
week 4; 2/5 – 2/7	<p><b><u>UNIT 2: Hell Bent for Leather</u></b>  Virtuosity and the classical connection (featuring our very own <i>Sungmin Shin!</i>)  Masculinity and gender issues  <i>This is Spinal Tap</i> (1984)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walser Ch. 3-4</li> <li>• Listening- playlist 3</li> <li>• <b>Song analysis #1 due 2/7</b></li> <li>• Krenske &amp; McKay article</li> </ul>
week 5; 2/12 – 2/14	<p>The New Wave of British Heavy Metal:  Iron Maiden, Judas Priest  The American scene in the early 1980s  Magazines and tape trading  Black Sabbath—The Dio years  Early black metal—Venom, Mercyful Fate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOTB Ch. 2+3</li> <li>• Waksman Ch. 5</li> <li>• Listening- playlist 4</li> <li>• <b>Interview due 2/14</b></li> </ul>
week 6; 2/19 – 2/21	<p><b><u>UNIT 3: Caught in a Mosh</u></b>  MTV, image, and iconography  Politicizing metal  Censorship and the PMRC  <i>Anvil!: The Story of Anvil</i> (2008)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOTB Ch. 4-7</li> <li>• Bayer Ch. 5 (online)</li> <li>• Chastagner PMRC article</li> <li>• Took &amp; Weiss article</li> <li>• Prepare for listening quiz</li> </ul>
week 7; 2/26 – 2/28	<p>Special guest <b>Danny Lilker</b> on 2/26  <b>Quiz #2—listening</b> on 2/28  Thrash/Power metal and the “Big Four”:  Metallica, Megadeth, Slayer, Anthrax  Death metal and Satanism  Christian metal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOTB Ch. 8-9, 14</li> <li>• Luhr article</li> <li>• Make sure you have made a second blog entry</li> <li>• Work on midterm</li> </ul>
week 8; 3/5 – 3/7	<p><b><u>UNIT 4: Am I Evil?</u></b>  Scandinavian black metal  Doom metal  West Memphis 3 &amp; <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1996)  Court cases—Ozzy, Priest, Slayer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOTB Ch. 11-12, 16-17</li> <li>• Dee article</li> <li>• Listening- playlist 5</li> <li>• <b>Take-home midterm due 3/7</b></li> </ul>
3/12 – 3/14	<b>SPRING BREAK!</b>	
week 9; 3/19 – 3/21	<p><b><u>UNIT 5: Talk Dirty to Me</u></b>  Glam Metal/Hair Bands—Hanoi Rocks, Motley Crue, Poison, Twisted Sister  The power ballad  <i>Decline of Western Civilization II</i> (1988)  Guns n Roses  The bluesy resurgence—Cinderella, Kix, Faster Pussycat  “Core” competencies: punk, hardcore, metalcore, grindcore</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOTB Ch. 10, 13</li> <li>• Breen article</li> <li>• Watch DWC II excerpts</li> <li>• Listening- playlist 6</li> </ul>

week 10; 3/26 – 3/28	Metallica “Black” album Nirvana, the early 1990s, and the death of glam metal Globalization and ethnic issues Prog and avant-garde metal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOTB Ch. 15</li> <li>• Wilson “Mean Deviation” excerpt</li> <li>• LeVine “Heavy Metal Islam” excerpt</li> <li>• Final project assigned</li> </ul>
week 11; 4/2 – 4/4	The influence of rap and funk Concept albums 90s underground and the year 1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arnett article</li> <li>• Rafalovich article</li> <li>• Read concept album synopses</li> <li>• Listening- playlist 7/ prepare for listening quiz</li> <li>• Make sure you have made a third blog entry</li> </ul>
week 12; 4/9 – 4/11	<b><i>UNIT 6: You Can’t Stop Rock &amp; Roll</i></b> <b>Quiz #3—listening</b> on 4/9 The metal concert experience Rebound and redemption Metal in popular culture <i>Metallica: Some Kind of Monster</i> (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SOTB Ch. 18-20</li> <li>• Weinstein Ch. 6</li> <li>• Hanlon article</li> </ul>
week 13; 4/16 – 4/18	Family tree check-up Branching out further into subgenres Catch up Final presentations (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Song analysis #2 due 4/18</b></li> <li>• Work on final projects</li> <li>• Final blog entry</li> </ul>
week 14; 4/23 – 4/25	What does it all mean? Catch up <b>Reflective papers due</b> Final presentations (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on final projects</li> <li>• Study for Exam (if applicable)</li> </ul>
week 15; 4/30	<b>Final projects due</b> Optional <b>Exam</b> on Tuesday 4/30 (Wednesday 5/1 is the last day of classes)	NO final exam during finals week.

## Grading

The course grade will be calculated in one of two ways, depending on your preferences. Choose your own adventure!

### Option I: Seek and Destroy

Participation/Homework Assignments/Song Analyses:	15%
Listening Quizzes:	15%
Midterm:	20%
Smaller Scale Final Project or Reflective Paper (due on 4/25):	20%
Exam (not too long, based on class readings):	30%

### Option II: Whiplash

Participation/Homework Assignments/Song Analyses:	15%
Listening Quizzes:	15%
Midterm:	20%
Expanded Final Project (research paper, album review, interview, etc.):	40%
Final Reflective Paper (3 pages max, due on 4/25):	10%



**Grading Scale(% of total available points)**

- A** 90% to 100%
- B** 80% to 89.99%
- C** 70% to 79.99%
- D** 60% to 69.99%
- E** The Thing That Should Not Be

