

Description and Rationale for the Course
THE MUSICS OF MULTICULTURAL AMERICA

Description

The Musics of Multicultural America is an introductory survey course on the multicultural music of the United States. It includes examples of the musics of Native Americans, European Americans, African Americans, Chicano/Latino Americans, and Asian Americans, tracing the development of that music from its historical roots to its influence on contemporary American music. Special attention is given to each group's unique history and experience in American culture and society; analysis of each group's special musical traditions from a technical and a cultural perspective; and sequential development of listening and descriptive skills through a variety of media including films and recordings.

It is an introductory music listening course intended for students who have no prior musical training. The course can be offered through both Music and Ethnic Studies Departments (or cross-listed between the two) and can be used to meet General Education Humanities Requirements, General Education Ethnic Studies Requirements, and Music and Ethnic Studies Degree Electives. The course was developed under the supervision of UC Berkeley's Center for the Study of American Cultures and is currently on the state IGETC transfer/articulation list. Furthermore, Foothill College's course has been accepted by UC Berkeley as meeting its American Cultures Breadth Requirement.

Rationale

What is it that makes America unique? It is that it is a country of immigrants. Granted there was an indigenous population, but that population was almost immediately marginalized. When the new United States government decided to take stock of its citizens in the first official census of 1790, Native Americans were not even counted; and two hundred years later in the 1990 census, they comprised less than 1 percent (.8) of the total population. Most of the over-263 million people who currently call themselves Americans are either immigrants themselves or they are the descendants of immigrants. And immigration continues at an unprecedented rate. Not since the turn of the century have so many of the nation's residents been born in other countries. On the West Coast, one in five is foreign-born; in California, it is one in four.

During the new nation's first century, almost all immigrants came from Western Europe. But in the 19th century and in the current century there has been a gradual but steady shift away from Western Europe to other parts of Europe and the rest of the world. Today, although many Americans still feel their closest cultural allegiance is to Western Europe, there is a growing number of Americans who do not. Of the foreign-born Americans counted in the 1990 census, fewer than 1 in 8 came from Western Europe. The vast majority of immigrants came from Asia, the Caribbean, or one of the countries of Central America, particularly Mexico. The ancestry of American-born citizens reflects a similar shift: while the percentage of "Whites" actually *decreased* by almost 3%, Blacks increased 14.2%, Hispanics increased 53%, and Asians doubled. The message and the pattern are clear: America continues to be a country of immigrants, and now these immigrants are coming from all over the world, creating the most diverse and multicultural population of any nation on Earth.

What is it that makes American music unique? Like the population of the United States, music in the United States is diverse and eclectic, drawing from the many different cultural traditions of its people. Paralleling its immigrant patterns, the early history of American music reflected the primary Western European culture. At first the colonists simply transplanted European music, but later, American musicians such as Heinrich, Gottschalk, Sousa, and Ives composed their own American versions of these European traditions. As the flood of immigrants diversified, and once African-Americans were freed from bondage, American musicians began creating a whole range of musical genres that have non-European ethnic roots. Examples of these uniquely American multicultural musics include Spirituals, Gospel, Blues, Jazz, Cajun, Zydeco, Salsa, Banda, Tejano, Rock and Roll, Soul and Rap.

What is it that makes this course unique? For several decades now, higher education curricula have attempted to reflect the fact that the population of the United States is increasingly derived from non-Western European cultures, and that these cultural groups have made significant contributions to United States culture. It is for this reason that many campuses have initiated ethnic studies requirements and have

founded whole departments in non-Western traditions. Music Departments have generally met this challenge by retaining the standard music curriculum (which is based on the "classical" music traditions of Western Europe) and adding new World Music courses that address the music of non-Western cultures.

Yet neither categories of curriculum meet the needs of all of today's students. The standard music curriculum and texts do not take into account that music in the United States is derived from a variety of musical traditions beyond Western European-based "classical" music, including folk, blues, jazz, religious music, popular music, and the vernacular music of different immigrant groups. The "World Music" curriculum is not always successful in making the information relevant to American students because the music and the cultures that are typically studied are often remote to students' experience and aesthetic interests. These courses are important. But *Musics of Multicultural America* enhances course offerings by placing the ethnic dimension at the core, recognizing and celebrating the contributions of non-European immigrants and Native Americans as well as European immigrants, thereby more accurately reflecting the diversity of contemporary and historical American culture.