

Syllabus for JIMI HENDRIX/JANIS JOPLIN

Fromm Institute

8 Thursdays, 10am-11:40am

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Weeks One through Four: Jimi Hendrix

Week One

I. The Roots of Jimi Hendrix

A. Jimi Hendrix grows up in Seattle, and learns guitar while playing in rock'n'roll groups in his high school years. As an 18-year-old, he enlists in the army in 1961 and continues to work with bands while stationed in Kentucky before his early discharge in mid-1962.

B. Over the next four years, Hendrix refines his craft as a guitarist in numerous bands. He also plays as a guitarist, usually for short temporary stints, in backup bands for soul stars like Little Richard, the Isley Brothers, and Ike and Tina Turner, as well as doing some obscure recordings as a sideman to gain his first experience in the studio.

C. In the mid-'60s, Hendrix more or less settles in New York and continues to get pickup work in studios and onstage. By mid-1966, however, he becomes determined to lead his own group, singing as well as playing guitar.

Other themes: Troubled family upbringing in Seattle; influences from numerous rock, soul, and blues greats ranging from B.B. King and Albert King to Ike Turner and Curtis Mayfield; early hints of the flamboyant stage presence and dress sense that would distinguish his shows as a frontman.

II. Rise to Stardom in the UK

A. In summer 1966, Chas Chandler, bassist in the British rock group the Animals, sees Hendrix playing as a bandleader in a Greenwich Village club. Knocked out and surprised that no one's signed such a prodigious talent, he convinces Hendrix to move to London, where Chandler will produce his records and co-manage Jimi with Mike Jeffery.

B. In London, Hendrix teams up with drummer Mitch Mitchell and bassist Noel Redding to form the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Even before the group's first records, Hendrix strikes a reputation as the hottest guitarist in town, impressing top rivals like Eric Clapton.

C. A flurry of British hit singles in the first half of 1967—"Hey Joe," "Purple Haze," and "And the Wind Cries Mary"—establish Hendrix as a star in the UK. His live concerts awe both audiences and fellow musicians, both for his innovative techniques and his showmanship. He's now becoming a formidable songwriter as well, though he'd written little or nothing before moving to London.

D. At the beginning of the summer, Hendrix plays his first shows in the US as a bandleader. 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.

Other themes: the influence of Bob Dylan on Hendrix's songwriting and decision to start singing as well as playing guitar; the influence of British guitarists Jeff Beck, Pete Townshend, and Eric Clapton on his move from soul-rock to psychedelia; adjustments to British life with new managers, girlfriend Kathy Etchingham, and touring in the UK.

Week Two

I. Rise to Stardom in the US

A. 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.

B. Hendrix tours the US on a legendarily mismatched bill that puts him in support to the Monkees. Although the Experience are taken off the tour in ten days, they build a huge following in the US, first in the underground and then in general, as *Are You Experienced?* becomes a huge hit album in the second half of 1967.

Other themes: the growth of FM radio and the market for LPs rather than hit singles helps Hendrix gain US stardom; Hendrix's pioneering use of amplification and feedback; venues like the Fillmore in San Francisco and festivals like Monterey provide a growing and suitable market for his concerts.

II. Consolidating Global Superstardom

A. Returning to the UK, Hendrix continues to record and perform at a prodigious rate. It's becoming evident that his future lies with concentrating on albums rather than singles, and he spends more and more time in the studio with the Experience and Chandler.

B. Before returning to the US, he tours parts of Europe and plays in part of a UK package tour also featuring Pink Floyd and the Nice (with Keith Emerson), among other groups. His personal life becomes more volatile as he embraces the psychedelic lifestyle.

C. The Experience complete their second album, *Axis: Bold As Love*, which is released at the end of 1967. Not as sensational as *Are You Experienced?*, it's still a best-seller, and shows him expanding into new areas as both a recording artist and songwriter, if sometimes lower-key than his earlier discs.

D. In 1968, the Experience focus on the US market with intense and sometimes haphazard nationwide touring, Hendrix also starting to record as well as perform in his homeland.

Other themes: the challenges of presenting the Experience's music in concert; his changing attitudes to recording as he gained more

studio experience; legal difficulties start to arise from contracts Hendrix signed before moving to London.

Week Three

I. *Electric Ladyland*

A. With the double LP *Electric Ladyland*, Hendrix records his most ambitious project, the songs ranging from concise covers to sprawling epics. Using far more time in the studio than he had before 1968, he also uses some musicians from outside the Experience for some tracks.

B. But producer Chas Chandler, fed up with Jimi's growing entourage of hangers-on and mix of disorganization and increasingly demanding perfectionism in the studio, quits during the *Electric Ladyland* sessions. Noel Redding is also getting unhappy with the way some things are going, and doesn't play on some of the album's songs.

Other themes: Eddie Kramer's growing role as recording engineer; contributions of outside musicians like Stevie Winwood and Jefferson Airplane's Jack Casady; ties within the Experience weaken as Hendrix's life and music changes.

II. The End of the Experience

A. Although *Electric Ladyland* tops the US charts, the original Jimi Hendrix Experience never records another album. Hendrix, Mitchell, and Redding play their last show as the Experience in late June of 1969.

B. Personal, legal, and business difficulties are mounting. A bust for drug possession in Canada threatens a jail sentence. With Chandler now out of the picture, Hendrix is increasingly at odds with Mike Jeffery. Legal problems from a record deal he'd signed before moving to London are making it more difficult to keep recording and to fund the studio he wants to build in New York, *Electric Lady*.

C. Uncertain of his future musical direction, Hendrix often records in the studio with various musicians, though no new albums appear in 1969. He's also uncertain of who should be in his new group, though bassist and old friend Billy Cox emerges as the constant presence. In the midst of this instability, he famously closes the Woodstock festival with his rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner."

Other themes: Hendrix's goals for creative and artistic independence by building his own studio; the numerous unissued tracks he records in 1969; his influence is felt throughout rock as louder and heavier blues-rock groups like Cream, Led Zeppelin, and the Jeff Beck Group become stars.

III. The Band of Gypsys

A. Hendrix forms a new group, the Band of Gypsys, with Billy Cox on bass and Buddy Miles on drums. Miles has already played on some of Jimi's studio sessions.

B. The Band of Gypsys perform some concerts at New York's Fillmore East on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day that are recorded for a hit live album. This is released, in part, to settle a long-standing legal dispute with Ed Chalpin, with whom Hendrix had signed a contract before being discovered by Chas Chandler.

C. However, the Band of Gypsys don't release a studio album, breaking up in early 1970. Hendrix forms a new lineup with Cox and returning drummer Mitchell, who tour the world in Jimi's final months.

Other themes: the toll his bust in Canada took on him, though he was acquitted; studio perfectionism gets in the way of him completing another studio album; pressure on Hendrix to become more political from black power groups.

Week Four (first half)

I. Death and Posthumous Legacy

A. Electric Lady Studios is finally completed, and Hendrix plays some shows in Europe before visiting London in September 1967.

Although he's recorded a lot of material over the past couple years, he's still uncertain about how to shape it into a studio album, and is still dogged by management and business problems.

B. Hendrix dies in his sleep of complications from barbiturate intoxication on September 18, 1970, in a London residential hotel where he's staying with girlfriend Monika Dannemann. A studio album, *The Cry of Love*, is cobbled together from what he's worked on since *Electric Ladyland*, becomes a best-seller after its release in early 1971.

C. Over the last half century, countless posthumous albums have been drawn from the mountain of concert recordings and studio outtakes Hendrix recorded in the last four years of his life. His legacy was also preserved in several films centered around live concert footage.

Other themes: the battle over Hendrix's estate; controversies about posthumous overdubs on Hendrix albums released after his death; his enduring influence on rock guitar.

Weeks Four through Eight: Janis Joplin

Week Four (second half)

I. The Roots of Janis Joplin

A. Janis Joplin is born on January 19, 1943 and grows up in Port Arthur, Texas. Although she exhibits academic and artistic talent, her adolescence is troubled as she has difficulty fitting in with her peers socially, and displays some of the reckless behavior for which she'll become noted as an adult.

B. In Austin, Joplin begins to sing folk and blues in clubs. While she's still a misfit in campus life at the University of Texas, she finds more of a musical and social home among the counterculture that congregates around such venues.

C. Trips to San Francisco and New York don't result in establishing a successful professional career. In 1965, she returns home to Port Arthur, where her worried parents want her to recuperate from the serious substance abuse she's undergone while away from Texas.

Other themes: the Port Arthur, Texas environment that both alienated her and inspired her to build something different away from where she grew up; early folk and blues influences, such as Bessie Smith; informal recordings from her early years, some with future Jefferson Airplane guitarist Jorma Kaukonen, some issued on posthumous compilations.

II. Joining Big Brother & the Holding Company in San Francisco

A. In early 1966, Joplin drifts back into performing in Texas. In May 1966, her old Texan friend Chet Helms, who's emerging as one of the top promoters of the exploding San Francisco rock scene, convinces her to try moving to San Francisco again, this time to join a rock band he's involved with, Big Brother & the Holding Company.

B. It's the first time she's sung with a rock band, and at first after joining in June, she only sings about half the lead vocals. But she boosts Big Brother's appeal immensely, and quickly becomes accepted as a full member of the band.

Other themes: differences between Big Brother before and after Joplin joined; Haight-Ashbury community in which Big Brother played and lived; adjustment to singing with loud rock instruments in concert halls.

Week Five

I. Monterey

A. By the beginning of 1967, Big Brother are entrenched as one of the three or four most locally popular San Francisco bands, along with Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and Quicksilver Messenger Service. They've also signed an inadvisably poor record

contract with Chicago label Mainstream Records, and recorded their first album, though it won't come out until the summer.

B. Along with several other top San Francisco groups, Big Brother & the Holding Company play in June 1967 at the Monterey Pop festival, the first large rock festival. Big Brother, and particularly Janis, are a big hit, so much so that they're convinced to do an unplanned second performance so it can be part of the *Monterey Pop* film documentary.

II. Albert Grossman and Columbia Records

C. Their Monterey performance attracts the attention of Albert Grossman, probably the most successful manager in the music business, who handles Bob Dylan and other prestigious clients. Grossman becomes Big Brother's manager, which will both boost their success and work against their longevity as a band.

D. Although their first album comes out in August, Big Brother's quest for national success is stifled from being tied to a small label and poor contract. With Grossman's help, they get out of their deal with Mainstream Records and sign with one of the biggest record companies in the world, Columbia.

Other themes: Joplin's skill as interpreter of a wide range of blues, folk, and soul material; the milieu of the Monterey Pop Festival, a key event in the evolution of San Francisco rock; her rise as a hero and role model for women in rock.

Week Six

I. Rise to Superstardom

A. Even before they release anything on Columbia Records, Big Brother start to develop a following outside of California with tours and media attention, especially in New York.

B. The recording of their *Cheap Thrills* album is fraught with tension, with indecision as to whether to make it a live or studio recording, and conflicts in the studio with producer John Simon.

C. Largely a studio recording with some live material, *Cheap Thrills* soars to #1 when it's released in summer 1968. Big Brother are now big national stars, though the ride will be short-lived.

Other themes: drug use and other problems erode Big Brother's stability; Joplin's volatile relationships, including with such fellow San Francisco rock stars as Country Joe McDonald and Pigpen of the Grateful Dead; difficulty in replicating the energy of live concerts in the studio.

II. The End of Big Brother

A. Almost from the time of the Monterey Pop Festival, there's been more and more focus on Joplin as the star of Big Brother, to the point where they're sometimes billed as Janis Joplin and Big Brother. In the views of some, manager Albert Grossman also stokes Joplin's solo ambitions.

B. *Cheap Thrills* is still at the top of the charts when it's announced that Joplin will be going solo. Big Brother & the Holding Company do continue to record and perform without Joplin, but never with anywhere near the popularity of what they did with Janis.

C. By the end of 1968, Joplin has formed a new band. The only member of Big Brother she brings along is guitarist Sam Andrew. Meanwhile her indulgences in alcohol, drugs, and rock excess are growing, though at this point not threatening her life or livelihood.

Other themes: controversies over the quality of Big Brother's musicianship; struggle between solo ambitions and loyalty to Big Brother; rising external pressures on Joplin's career.

Week Seven

I. The Kozmic Blues Band

A. Joplin's new band, the Kozmic Blues Band, doesn't feature San Francisco mainstays, aside from Sam Andrew. It also goes in a more

pronounced soul direction than Big Brother, both in the material and the arrangements, which use horns.

B. Although they tour Europe and the only album Joplin records with them (*I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama*) makes the Top Five, it gets a mixed reception by both audiences and critics. The lineup isn't stable, Sam Andrew getting fired by the time they played Woodstock.

C. By the end of 1969, the Kozmic Blues Band have broken up. Joplin's as big a star as ever, but has to find a new musical ensemble and direction again.

Other themes: new influences from soul music, including singers like Lorraine Ellison and songwriters like Jerry Ragovoy; erratic onstage performances, possibly explaining her failure to appear in the *Woodstock* film.

Week Eight

I. The Full Tilt Boogie Band and Final Year

A. In early 1970, Joplin forms another group, the Full Tilt Boogie Band, with some members of the Kozmic Blues Band and some other musicians.

B. The band is well received in performances as part of the Festival Express tour and on the *Dick Cavett Show*, and generally considered a better fit.

C. 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.

Other themes: the influence of *Pearl* producer Paul Rothchild; influence of songwriters like Kris Kristofferson and Bob Neuwirth; continuing wild personal life, including hard drug use

II. Death and Legacy

A. On October 4, 1970, near the time when the *Pearl* sessions were supposed to be wrapping up, Joplin is found dead of a heroin overdose in a Los Angeles hotel room.

B. 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.

C. Like Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison, peers who died around the same time, Joplin’s legacy is preserved by numerous films, books, and reissues.

Other themes: her influence on the image of women in rock; speculation as to what she might have achieved had she survived longer.