

New course examines America's music rut

By Darla Jackson
Emerald Supplements Editor

Critics of American popular music say today's releases lack creativity and imagination. They say music heard on the radio is stagnant, boring and repetitive.

Dr. Paul Friedlander is one of those critics. Friedlander, a rock music historian and a professor at the University, believes his new course, called World Popular Music, makes America's music "rut" all the more obvious.

The course, open to all students and requiring no musical background, will examine popular music heard all across the globe, from the Soviet Union to Africa to the Caribbean. Friedlander feels that music being made on other parts of the globe "is the most exciting music coming out today."

"Western popular music is stagnating, even though the world offers a wide variety of music worth listening to," Friedlander said. "It's a reflection of our culture that we're not experimenting with new styles."

"If you live for 10 years under the Reagan years and the conformity that comes with it, it suppresses experimentation. The music will reflect that," he added.

Another reason American music is in a rut has to do with the music industry, Friedlander said.

"The industry itself has become less risk-taking, and they sign artists who don't offer much substance," he said.

Friedlander, who also teaches two courses in rock history, said the World Popular Music

class will introduce innovative music styles and delve into the cultures and societies that are connected with each style. Students will divide up into teams and research a particular type of international music, he said.

"The teams will try to capture the essence of the music, by researching the artists and the nature of society at the time the music came out," he said. "Then they'll come back and lay it on us."

Friedlander said he's excited about teaching the new course and he plans to offer it again in the spring. He feels the subject matter is important because it allows listeners to realize the avenues of music they can explore.

As far as the fate of American popular music goes, Friedlander said he is guardedly optimistic that the situation will improve.



Photo by Mark Ylen

Dr. Paul Friedlander, a rock music historian, is teaching a new course at the University called World Popular Music.

"Hopefully America will again be willing to adopt influences from other parts of the world," he said. "But it's going to take a willingness to go outside the normal channels."

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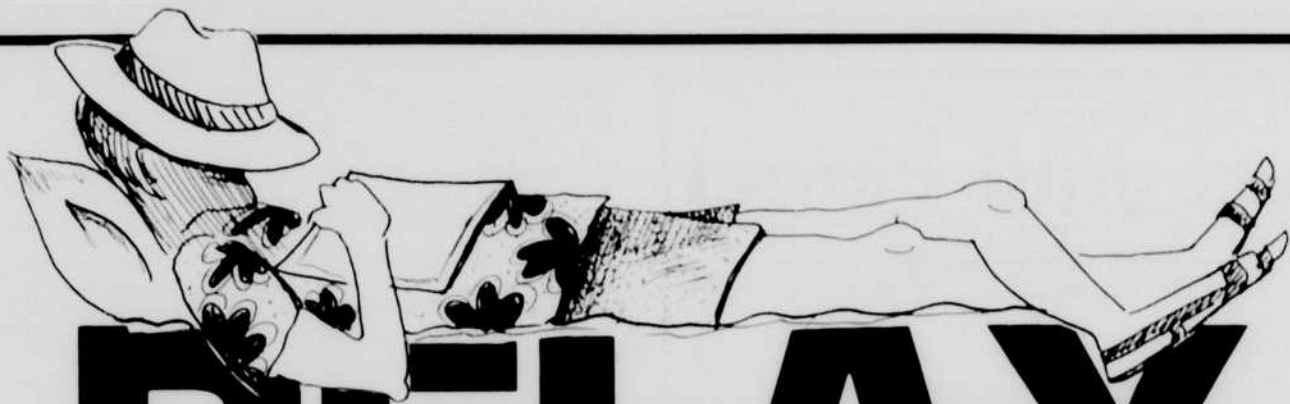
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