

# Swedish Pop Music and Contemporary Culture

Fall 2026

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This course sociologically explores the dynamic relationship between Swedish popular music and contemporary culture, examining how music reflects, shapes, and challenges societal change and formations of cultural identity. Key themes include the international success and influence of Swedish popular music, including the rise of globally recognized artists, producers, and songwriters who have shaped international pop aesthetics. Sweden's popular music export is considered alongside less internationally visible formations of genre as well as music industry and cultural policy frameworks. The course further critically examines the role of digital and algorithmic technology—exemplified by platforms like Spotify—in contemporary music industries, and investigates how streaming has transformed the production, distribution, and consumption of music in the 21st century. The course also highlights key contemporary Swedish artists in genres ranging from commercial pop to electronic dance music and hip hop, to investigate how styles and personae mediate cultural politics and formations of identity within local and global frameworks. Students will examine these themes through scholarly texts, music and media examples. No formal musical training is required.

**Google Classroom:** The Swedish Program uses the Google Classroom as a learning platform. On the course page, you will find readings, slides, and assignments as well as links to music and material and other useful resources. I will use the course platform to contact you with information and questions throughout the semester, and you will also submit your assignments through the course platform.

**Readings:** Course literature includes chapters from three assigned books, listed below, as well as additional articles and chapters. All course literature will be available on the course website or provided by the program. The three books are:

Björnberg, A., & Bossius, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Made in Sweden: Studies in Popular Music*. Taylor & Francis.

Holt, F., & Kärjä, A. V. (Eds.). (2017). *The Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries*. Oxford University Press.

Johansson, O. (2020). Songs from Sweden: Shaping Pop Culture in a Globalized Music Industry. Palgrave Macmillan.

**Phones:** Phone use is strictly prohibited during class time, and the use of phones will negatively affect your grade.

**Grading:** Your grade will be calculated according to the following breakdown:

*Attendance and participation:* 20%

*Literature presentations:* 20%

*Research project:* 60%

**Attendance & Participation (20%):** Attendance is mandatory for all classes and unexcused absence as well as frequent excused absence may negatively affect your final grade. If you are considerably late for class, this may be counted as an absence. You should always contact me to request permission for any excused absence as early as possible. Excused absences can include illness or an emergency such as the death of a family member, but not leisure travel. For repeated absences, whether excused or unexcused, you may be required to complete additional work.

In addition to attendance, your active participation in class discussions is essential. You are expected to post your questions and reflections about the respective topic and readings ahead of each class on the course platform.

**Literature presentations (2 x 10%):** You will do two presentations of selected course readings during the semester. Each presentation should introduce the rest of the class to an assigned text and present its main questions, aims, methods, concepts, and findings. The presentations should be about 10 minutes in length and are also to be submitted in written form. All students are expected to prepare for every class by reading all course literature.

**Research project (60%):** The largest part of your final grade is determined by an individual research project on a topic of your choice, which is to be discussed with me during the first two weeks of the course. Your project should be an in-depth investigation of an aspect of Swedish pop music and contemporary society that has not been covered in class in depth. Your topic should use and incorporate what you have learned through course readings and seminars. To help structure your research, you will submit written research tasks every few weeks. You will receive written feedback on all research tasks and grades on its two major parts: the research proposal and full project. Guidelines for all research tasks will be available on the course website. The research tasks are as follows:

**W37: Research questions (5%).** Identify a broad area of interest and refine it into a clear, focused, and researchable question/questions. This involves conducting preliminary reading, identifying gaps or debates in the existing knowledge, and formulating 1-3 questions that guide your individual research project (approx. 500 words).

**W39: Research proposal (10%).** Write a formal research proposal outlining the aims, scope, and structure of your project. The proposal should include a rationale, research question(s), proposed methodology, and a preliminary bibliography. This helps you plan your work and receive feedback before proceeding. You will be given a detailed list of what to include to help guide you when writing your proposal (approx. 1500-2000 words). This research task will be graded.

**W40: Peer review (5%).** You will provide written feedback on the proposals of two colleagues. You will find further information and peer review groups on the course page (approx. 500 words).

**W42: Literature review (5%).** You will conduct a structured review of existing academic literature related to your research topic. You will identify five to eight relevant sources, summarize key theories, debates, and research findings, and synthesize that information to position your own research project within the field (approx. 1500-2000 words).

**W46: Analysis and discussion outline (5%).** At this stage, you will sketch the preliminary results of your project by providing an outline of key themes and an initial discussion of your themes in relationship to previous research (approx. 1000 words).

**W49: Full project (30%).** Your final research report synthesizes your previous submissions as well as a full analysis and discussion (approx. 6000-8000 words, excl. bibliography). I will provide guidelines for structure and format as well as information about grading criteria on the course platform.

**Late assignments:** Assignments that are submitted after the deadline may not be accepted.

**Course learning outcomes:** At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge about key industry actors and cultural policy frameworks of Swedish pop music

- Identify primary characteristics of Swedish popular music and society through prominent genres and artists
- Critically analyze the relationship of popular music to contemporary society through theoretical frameworks including cultural and national identity as well as local, global, and postcolonial perspectives

**Academic dishonesty:** In the unfortunate case of any kind of cheating or plagiarism, students receive an automatic F for the exam or paper in question. Moreover, the student may also receive an immediate F for the course. Such a decision will be made in consultation with the Director and Executive Director. Any form of academic dishonesty is a violation of our code of conduct, and as such, may result in further disciplinary actions. While we expect the policy on AI-assisted writing to evolve further, the Program's current policy is as follows. AI-assisted writing is a tool, similar to relying on outside sources. Just as with outside sources, AI-assisted writing is permissible as long as its use is properly documented and does not substitute for students' doing the actual writing work. For all written take-home assignments, students who have used AI to assist them are required to submit a summary describing how they have used AI to help them complete the assignment (producing text, proofreading, finding citations, etc.). In addition, students also have to clearly indicate which passages have been produced or assisted by AI, for example in a footnote that details how AI was used in that particular instance. Failure to acknowledge one's use of AI to complete an assignment will count as academic dishonesty and be subject to the same penalties as outright plagiarism or other forms of cheating. AI must never be used for "creative" work, like generating ideas, comparing theories, etc.

**Schedule:**

W36	1 <i>Introduction: Swedish pop music and contemporary culture</i>	Room
Readings: Björnberg & Bossius, "Introduction: The Small Country that Grew Big in Popular Music", in <i>Made in Sweden</i> (1-9)		

Bennett, "Sociological Perspectives on Music and Place, in *Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries* (45-56)

Bohlman, "Musical Borealism: Nordic Music and European History, in *Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries* (33-56)

Schiller, "Music and the Nation", in *Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries* (301-313)

W37 2 Examining the Swedish Music Export 'Miracle' Room

Readings: Fleischer, "Swedish Music Export: The Making of a Miracle", in *Made in Sweden* (153-162)

Holt, "Nordic Modernity and the Structure of the Musical Landscape", in *Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries* (57-74)

Johansson, "Introduction: The Swedish Music Miracle, from 1.0 to 2.0", in *Songs from Sweden* (1-22)

Johansson, "Local Music in a Global Network: Circulation, Reputation, and Hybridity", in *Songs from Sweden* (25-42)

Submit: Research questions

W38 3 Popular Music, Policy, and the Music Industry Room

Readings: Björnberg, "Blacklists and Hitlists", in *Made in Sweden* (25-35)

Edström, "A Very Swedish Phenomenon", in *Made in Sweden* (15-23)

Johansson, "The Main Players", in *Songs from Sweden* (43-98)

Smith-Sivertsen, "The Story of Svensktoppen", in *Made in Sweden* (37-47)

W39 4 Popular Music History and Historiography Room

Readings: Eriksson, "Water Sprites and Herding Calls. References to Folk Music in Swedish Pop and Schlager Music 1990-2015", in *Made in Sweden* (131-139)

Dahlén, "When Post-Modern Times Arrived: Dork Punk and Nostalgia as Experiments of Cultural Orientation 1973-1989", in *Made in Sweden* (103-115)

Hyltén-Cavallius & Kaijser, "Swedish Prog Rock and the Search for a Timeless Utopia", in *Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries* (219-236)

Rhedin, "The Troubadours: Stylistic and Sociocultural Transformations of the Literary Visa in the 1960s", in *Made in Sweden* (53-63)

Villén [Kärja at time of print], "A Metahistorical Inquiry into Historiography of Nordic Popular Music", in *Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries* (185-202)

Submit: Research proposal

W40 *Guest lecture 1: Rebecca Dobre Billström, "Feminist practice, cultural policy and working conditions in Swedish popular music"* Room

Readings: de Boise, S. (2019). Tackling gender inequalities in music: a comparative study of policy responses in the UK and Sweden. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 25(4), 486-499.

Dobre Billström, R. (2022). Feminist musical engagements: the struggle against gender inequalities in music-making practices. PhD thesis. Örebro University. Chapters 1 and 6.

Flisbäck, M. (2013). Creating a life: the role of symbolic and economic structures in the gender

dynamics of Swedish artists. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19(4), 462-480.

Submit: Peer review

W41 *5 Mediations of Cultural and National Identity* Room

Readings: Brown et al., "The Midnight Sun Never Sets: An Email Conversation about Jazz, Race and National Identity in Denmark, Norway and Sweden", in *Afro-Nordic Landscapes* (57-83)  
Ramnarine, "Aspirations, Global Futures, and Lessons from Sámi Popular Music for the Twenty-First Century", in *Oxford Handbook* (277-292)  
Werner, "Titiyo: Race, Gender, and Genre in Swedish Popular Music", in *Made in Sweden* (189-198)  
Widegren, "The Politics of the Mask. The Knife as Queer-Feminists", in *Made in Sweden* (199-207)

W42 *Guest lecture 2: Ann Werner, The Girl and #MeToo Petitions from the Swedish Music Industry* Room

Readings: Werner, A. (2022). "Narratives about Gender and Feminism in a Music Industry #MeToo Petition" (49-76)  
Werner, A. (2023). "Whatever happened to the girl in# MeToo?" (516-524)

Submit: Literature review

W43 *Excursion* xx

W44 *Fall break*

W45 *6 Case Studies of International Success: Eurovision, Metal, and Swedish Songwriters*

Readings: Flood, P. D. (2025). "Everybody Wanna Move Like Us!" Performing Afro-Sweden in the Eurovision Song Contest (21-42)  
Johansson, "An Analysis of Swedish Pop Music" (99-136), in *Songs from Sweden*  
Nordström, "Contextualizing Extreme-Metal Music: The Case of the Swedish Metal Nursery", in *Made in Sweden* (121-130)

W46 *Guest lecture 3: Ann Werner, "DJ Superstars. Gender and Nation in Avicii, Erik Prydz and Swedish House Mafia (SHM)"* Room

Reading: Bossius, "Nordik Beats. Swedish Electronic Dance Music from Underground to Superstardom" (141-151)

Submit: Analysis and discussion outline

W47 *7 Digital Music Cultures* Room

Readings: Baym, "The Swedish Model: Balancing Markets and Gifts in the Music Industry" (22-38)  
Baym and Burnett, "Amateur Experts. International Fan Labour in Swedish Independent Music" (433-449)  
Eriksson et al., "Intervention: The Swedish Unicorn" (19-29)  
Muchitsch, Moura, and Perevedentseva, "Swimming Upstream? Independent Musicians and Music Platform Imaginaries" (forthcoming 2025, add pages)

W48 *8 Popular Music and Sociopolitical Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* Room

Readings: Åberg & Tyvelä, "Finnish and Swedish 'Gangsta Rap' as a Window on the dismantlement of the Nordic Welfare State" (288-311)  
D'Urso, "Hip Hop as Public Pedagogy", in *Oxford Handbook* (311-324)

Kallio & Väkevä, "Inclusive Popular Music Education?",  
in *Oxford Handbook* (75-90)

Werner, "Digitally Mediated Identity in the Cases of  
Two Sámi Artists", in *Oxford Handbook* (379-394)

W49 Exam week: Submit full research project