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Lawrence University

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From Blues to Broadway: Six-week Series Explores History of America’s Music

January 28, 2013

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Lawrence University opens a six-week program — “America’s Music: A Film History of Our Popular Music from Blues to Bluegrass to Broadway” — Thursday, Jan. 31 at 6:30 p.m. featuring documentary film screenings and scholar-led discussions of 20th-century American popular music.

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Each weekly session will begin with an introduction to the film and musical topic by Lawrence Visiting Assistant Professor of Music Erica Scheinberg. The film screening (approximately 50 minutes) and audience discussion (45 minutes) follows. The series is free and open to the public. All programs will be held in Lawrence’s Warch Campus Center cinema except for the Feb. 28 session, which will be conducted at the Appleton Public Library.

Designed for a general audience, the “America’s Music” series examines six 20th-century American musical topics that are deeply connected to the history, culture and geography of the United States: blues and gospel; jazz; mambo and hip hop; rock n’ roll; bluegrass and country; and Broadway. The series allows participants the opportunity to learn how today’s cultural landscape has been influenced by the development of the popular musical forms through film excerpts and interactive discussion.

“American popular music is a particularly exciting topic for a film and discussion series,” said Scheinberg. “We’ve all experienced the ways that music moves us, triggers memories, creates a sense of shared experience and community. But music also has a lot to tell us about the particular time and place in which it was created — the social, political and cultural forces that shaped it.

“The America’s Music series welcomes community members of all ages, backgrounds and experiences to watch and discuss music documentaries that portray the sights and
sounds of a diverse array of artists and musical styles,“ Scheinberg added. “It’s an opportunity to explore American history and to share and reflect upon our own experiences as music listeners.”

The onset of the 20th-century brought pervasive changes to American society. During the early part of the century, these social changes combined with new technologies to create a mass market for popular music that evolved over the next 100 years.

Each weekly screening and discussion session examines a musical topic in the context of key social and historical developments, with events in American music history acting as a catalyst for that examination.

In conjunction with the series and prior to the Feb. 28 program, the five-member Oshkosh-based bluegrass band Dead Horses will perform a free concert on Wednesday, Feb. 27 from 6:30-7:30 p.m. at the Appleton Public Library.

Lawrence was one of 50 sites nationally selected to host the “American Music” program. It is a project of the Tribeca Film Institute in collaboration with the American Library Association, Tribeca Flashpoint and the Society for American Music.

The “American Music” schedule:

• Jan. 31 — The Blues and Gospel Music, featuring excerpts from the films “Martin Scorsese Presents the Blues: Episode 1, Feel Like Going Home” and “Say Amen, Somebody,” Warch Campus Center cinema, 6:30 p.m.
• Feb. 7 — Swing Jazz, featuring excerpts from the films “The Velocity of Celebration,” by Ken Burns and “International Sweethearts of Rhythm,” Warch Campus Center cinema, 6:30 p.m.
• Feb. 14 — Latin Rhythms from Mambo to Hip-Hop, featuring excerpts from the films “Latin Music USA” and the documentary “From Mambo to Hip Hop: A South Bronx Tale,” Warch Campus Center cinema, 6:30 p.m.
• Feb. 21 — Rock, featuring excerpts from the film “The History of Rock ‘n’ Roll,” Warch Campus Center cinema, 6:30 p.m.
• Feb. 28 — Country and Bluegrass, featuring excerpts from the documentary “High Lonesome: The Story of Bluegrass Music,” Appleton Public Library, 6:30 p.m.
• March 7 — Broadway and Tin Pan Alley, featuring “Syncopated City,” the second episode of the award-winning series “Broadway: The American Musical.” This program is a prelude to the appearance of five-time Tony Award-winning singer Audra McDonald on the Lawrence University Artists Series, Sunday, March 10. Warch Campus Center, 6:30 p.m.