

# AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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## A&M's Own SCHOOLHOUSE ROCK!

History of Modern Rock tests over tunes, opens minds to different musical styles

By Jimmy Hissong  
THE BATTALION

They aren't learning about the American Revolution or the intricacies of legislative government through memorable melodies. They don't concern themselves with the functions of conjunctions, and they certainly don't address deforestation, the benefits of a well-balanced meal or the natural affection between a man and a woman through song and verse. Instead, Harris M. Berger's History of Modern Rock students are learning to do something different — they are learning what it takes to rock.

From learning to play the guitar at age 10 to publishing a book on his experiences in the underground heavy metal scene of Cleveland, Ohio, Berger has been profoundly influenced by rock music, and he is now bringing that influence into the classroom.

"Studying rock music has always been something I've wanted to do," Berger said. "Now I'm teaching it. It's kind of neat."

Students enrolled in Berger's class admit they weren't exactly sure what to expect of a course focused on rock 'n' roll when they enrolled.

"I always thought rock musicians just kind of got tired of boppin' and poppin'. But he shows us how it's all kind of linked together," said Joseph Williams, a senior bioenvironmental science major.

The course traces the evolution of modern rock throughout the 20th century. Rooted in mainstream pop, country and rhythm and blues of the 1940s, the first real emergence of rock 'n' roll didn't occur until the middle of the 1950s.

The response of the music industry to the sound in the late fifties gave way to the Beatles leading the British invasion of the 1960s.

Psychedelic and folk rock of the 1970s further fragmented listeners. By the time punk and glam rock broke out in the '80s, multiple fragmentations of rock music existed. Today, the diversity of the rock 'n' roll sound is still evident.

Berger cites specific examples of the influence one group has over another in the songs he plays for the class, which is a regular part of every lecture, and encourages students to study them at home.

"Homework is listening to music. I can handle that," said Allison Scoggins, a senior history and English major.

Berger further emphasizes his musical points with singing, strategically-timed hand gestures and even his own guitar. His eagerness in the expression of his love of rock 'n' roll has stimulated classroom participation and interest.

"I actually pay attention in this class," said Amber Clark, a senior education major.

While the History of Modern Rock curriculum does provide a crash course in the basic progression of modern music, Berger also focuses on a few key concepts he believes are important to appreciating music in general.

"At any given moment, a lot of music and a lot of ideas are going on," Berger said.

Region, class, race and gender all contribute to how infinitely diverse music is. There is no single point in time that can be isolated and generalized, he said.

"Not everyone in 1969 was a hippie," Berger said.

Through intense study, Berger encourages students to listen to music in new and creative ways.

"I really want students to appreciate what makes music work," said Berger. "I'd like them to hear different types of music and open themselves to a wider range of styles."

Local singer and songwriter Rich O'Toole, a junior communications major, explained how he was impacted by a recent class.

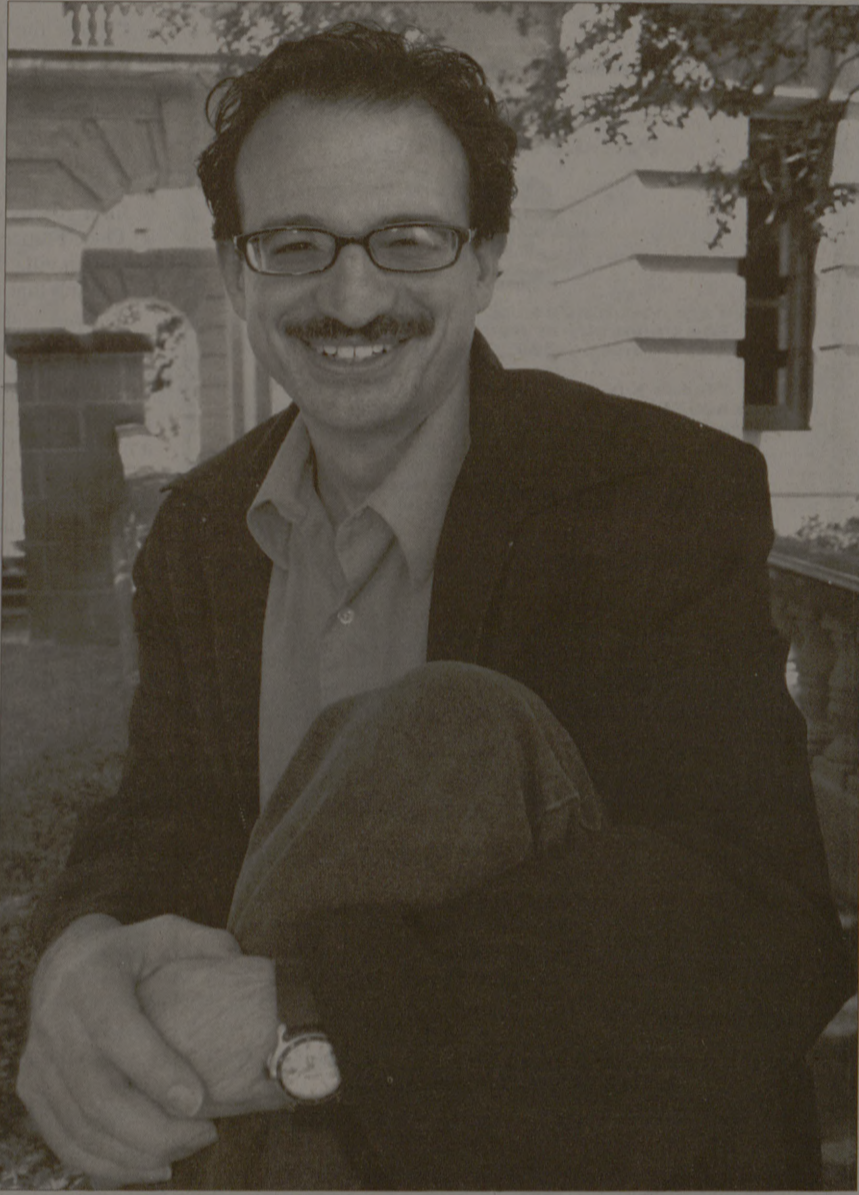
"A couple of my buddies and I sometimes sit around and play," O'Toole said.

But after listening to some tunes in lecture one day, he immediately went home and started laying down some blues riffs.

Though it is still too early in the semester for Berger's students to begin cramming for tests, a few already believe they possess some newfound musical knowledge.

"Sometimes I'll be sitting in my room and hear something and be like, hey, is that 12 bar blues?" Scoggins said.

If the heart of rock 'n' roll is in Cleveland, the brain is right here on the Texas A&M campus. Interested students hoping to take advantage of this local knowledge resource should check out up-and-coming semester course catalogues for Music 200: The History of Modern Rock.



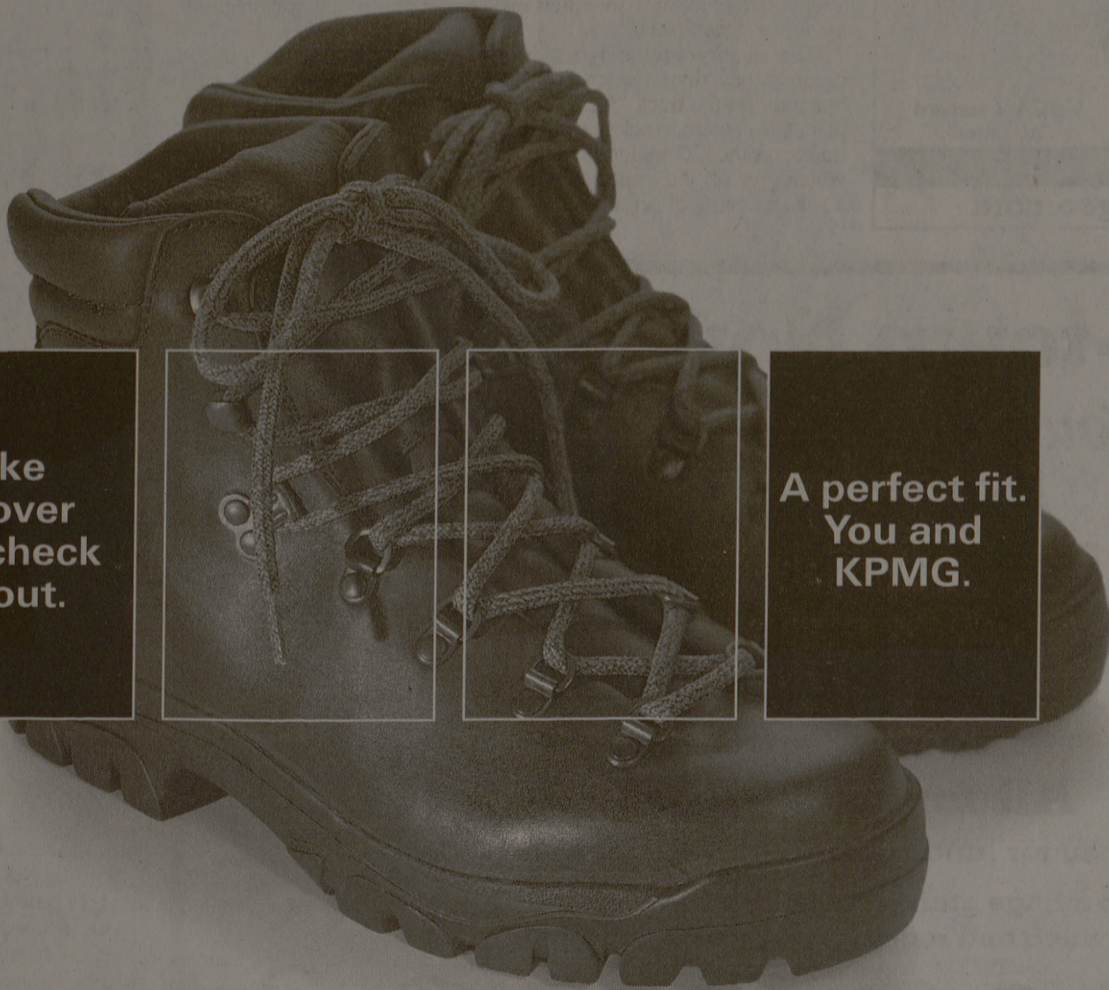
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Harris M. Berger uses his experiences with Cleveland's underground heavy metal scene in his class.

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