

Teaching Music Research Methodology at the Undergraduate Level: An Approach Developed at Memorial University of Newfoundland

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While it is usually possible to provide a modicum of research training at the undergraduate level in survey music-history courses, it is often difficult to provide more advanced training in smaller programmes. Even when a music-history major option is available to students, staffing problems will frequently prevent offering a dedicated upper-level course in research methodology for history majors. The need for such training for music-history majors is real, however, especially for those contemplating graduate study. This was a problem which I faced in the School of Music at Memorial University of Newfoundland several years ago when I was the only musicologist in a programme serving some 150 students. If an upper-level course was to be offered to serve the needs of the relatively small number of history majors, it also had to be available (and attractive) as an elective course for all music students.

At some universities, such instruction might be entrusted to a subject-specialist librarian or team-taught in conjunction with a faculty member. Such a scenario would offer many benefits to students and faculty members alike. Certainly a professional librarian would have a broader view of library resources than an individual faculty member might have. Unfortunately, the Queen Elizabeth II Library at Memorial University no longer employs a librarian whose principal subject specialization is music and, while the music programme is very well supported by our professional librarians, none would have

the time in their busy schedules to undertake the regular teaching of an undergraduate class. That said, the librarians do make a very significant contribution to the course, as is discussed below.

The challenge that faced me was to design a course which was sufficiently broad to embrace the various sub-disciplines in music offered in our programme (a general programme, as well as majors in history, theory/composition, performance, and music education), yet provide specific and detailed information suitable for music-history majors contemplating graduate studies. At the present time, our programme does not offer jazz studies, and courses in popular music are restricted to elective courses for non-majors. The current course outline does not embrace these areas of study in any significant way; however, this will change should the music curriculum change to include them. After much thought, it seemed best to allow the interests of the students and the programmes in which they are enrolled to determine partially the nature and scope of the classes from one year to the next. The following course description was developed to allow for the necessary latitude in the course:

A study of bibliography, and the various aspects of research methods appropriate to the disciplines of music. Students will participate in group and individual projects, and give a seminar presentation in class.

Unfortunately, no book presented itself as a viable resource for a text-driven course. Both John Druerdow's *Library Research Guide to Music, Illustrated Search Strategy and Sources* (1982) and Ruth Watanabe's *Introduction to Music Research* (1967) are seriously out of date and do not deal with the realities of the computer age. While there are sections in both which are still useful, the information which they contain can be easily incorporated into the introductory lectures without students purchasing either. Once the realization was made that the course could not be text-driven, but would have to draw upon a variety of sources (largely journal articles), any book purchased by the students became a reference tool. The following served this function admirably for the section on basic bibliography:

Crabtree, Phillip D., and Donald H. Foster.
Sourcebook for Research In Music.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
1993.

Not only is this book reasonably up-to-date in its contents, but it is clearly written and modestly priced—all considerations appealing to undergraduates. The book is similar to *Music Reference and Research Materials* by Vincent Duckles, and is exceptionally broadly-based for a book of its size (237 pages).

The course that resulted is structured in the following manner:

- 1) The first part of the course is lecture oriented and consists of a review of the basic skills necessary to undertake successful research in music. Topics that are discussed include:
 - i) Writing About Music: Issues and Solutions. Different writing styles (journalistic and research/scholarly) are discussed as well as criteria established for creating and refining research topics. For the latter, the approach presented in Druerdow's *Library Research Guide to Music* is particularly useful. The guidelines for measuring the breadth and depth of a proposed research topic give students a useful methodology which they can apply to their own work.
 - ii) Gathering Materials. Basic reference sources are described and evaluated in this part of the course. Topics include:
 - i) different methods of cataloguing music, paying special attention to the Library of Congress system;
 - ii) standard bibliographic resources, including accessing information in journals through print and electronic data bases, *RISM*, *RILM*, subject-based bibliographies, dictionaries and encyclopedias etc.;
 - iii) accessing information in dissertations through dissertation abstracts;
 - iv) examining various library and union catalogues;
 - v) accessing editions of music.
 - vi) searching and evaluating the resources of the Web;

Although somewhat out-of-date, the article, "Bibliographic Competencies for Music Students at an Undergraduate Level," which appeared in March 1984 issue of *Notes* (pp. 529-32) remains a useful document. It was prepared by members of the Bibliographic Instruction Committee of the MLA Midwest Chapter, and it attempts to identify "minimal skills which the undergraduate should be able to demonstrate at the point of graduation." The paper concerns itself with library skills which the authors feel are "essential to any undergraduate course of study for [they prepare] students to cope with ever-changing and increasing information needs." The article remains a good starting point for a course on research methodology in music.¹ Indeed, I like to give a self-test to the class when we begin "part b" of this section of the course, and ask the following questions which are based on the skills identified in the article:

- a) Where would you look to identify or find listings of major reference tools in music?
- b) Where would you look to find general overviews of musical topics, and/or composers?
- c) Where would you look to find definitions of specialized music terms?
- d) Where would you look to find biographical information about composers and performers?
- e) Where would you look to find specific

¹I am much indebted to Sandra Acker, retired music librarian at the University of Victoria, for directing me to this source.

references to journal articles, and/or abstracts?

f) Where would you look to find references to reviews of books and recordings?

g) Where would you look to find a listing of the contents (volume by volume) of a collected set of scores by a single composer, or of a multiple-composer, monument of music type of edition.

Responses vary considerably to this self-test, but students often conclude that they need to improve their library skills! This section of the course usually ends with several classes devoted to Web searching and Web evaluation. These classes are handled by the reference librarians in the Queen Elizabeth II Library who have developed a series of guided exercises for this purpose. The library provides a dedicated teaching space with computer terminals so that small classes can get hands-on experience. This is a service which is of great benefit to the students, and which could not be provided easily in a regular classroom.

2) The second part of the course deals with the various sub-disciplines of music. How each defines itself over a period of several decades, and the types of music research that are undertaken are discussed in guided seminars. The range of topics are, in part, determined by the interests and training of the class participants. Students are asked to read a variety of journal articles and/or chapters in books and come to class prepared to discuss them. In addition, each student must write up a summary of the relative merits of the article for inclusion in a journal which is

one of the written assignments for the course. The following is a partial list of some of the articles which have been used in the course:

Music History/Musicology

Butler, Gregory. "Ordering Problems in J.S. Bach's *Art of Fugue* Resolved." *Musical Quarterly* 69:1 (Winter 1983): 44-61.

Lippman, Edward A. "What Should Musicology Be?" *Current Musicology* 1 (1965): 55-60.

Rice, Paul F. "John Abraham Fisher's Music for the Opening of *Macbeth*." *College Music Symposium* 26 (1986): 7-13.

Tischler, Hans. "And What is Musicology?" *Music Review* 30 (November 1969): 253-60.

Ethnomusicology

Hauser, Michael. "Formal Structure in Polar Eskimo Drumsongs." *Ethnomusicology* 21:1 (January 1977): 33-53.

Merriam, Alan P. "Definitions of 'Comparative Musicology' and 'Ethnomusicology': An Historical-Theoretical Perspective." *Ethnomusicology* 21:2 (May 1977): 189-204.

Seeger, Charles. "Systematic Musicology: Viewpoints, Orientations, and Methods." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 4 (Fall 1951): 240-48.

Smith, Gordon E. "Lee Cremona: Narratives

About a Micmac Fiddler." *Canadian Music: Issues of Hegemony and Identity*. Edited by Beverley Diamond and Robert Witmer. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1994.

Performance

Dreyfus, Laurence. "Early Music Defended against its Devotees: A Theory of Historical Performance in the Twentieth Century." *Musical Quarterly* 69:3 (Summer 1983): 297-322.

Silverman, Robert J. "Physicians' Views of Physical Problems." *Piano Quarterly*. 120 (Winter 1982-83): 42-47.

Taruskin, Richard. "Tradition and authority." *Early Music* 20:2 (May 1992): 311-25.

Music Education

Rainbow, Edward L. and Hildegard C. Froehlich. *Research in Music Education: An Introduction to Systematic Inquiry*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1987. [Suggested reading would include the preface and pp. 1-34.]

Uppitis, Katharine Smithrim and Barbara J. Soren. "When Teachers Become Musicians and Artists: teacher transformation and professional development." *Music Education Research* 1:1 (March 1999): 23-35.

Theory

Salzer, Felix. "Chopin's Etude in F Major, Opus 25, No. 3: The Scope of Tonality."

The Music Forum. Edited by William J. Mitchell and Felix Salzer. Vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973): 281-90.

Brown, Matthew. "Tonality and Form in Debussy's *Prélude à L'Après-midi d'un faune*." *Music Theory Spectrum* 15:2 (Fall 1993): 127-44.



Given that the scope of the material to be covered in this part of the course can only be determined after students have enrolled, I have resisted the urge to bring together a course pack of articles to be sold in the book store. While a convenience for the students, it is never possible to predict what the interests of the class will be in sufficient time. I have included both older and newer articles in the above list and I have found that undergraduates were generally more interested in reading papers that dealt with specific pieces of music than in philosophy. One thing about which I felt strongly was that Canadian scholars should be represented in this list. I welcome suggestions for other articles which might be useful for an undergraduate audience.



3) The final part of the course deals with a seminar presentation from each member of the class. This presentation focuses on research methodology for a specific project, rather than finalized results of the research. Students

choose a topic of interest to them, and then outline the appropriate strategies for undertaking the necessary research for such a topic. In particular, they must decide what philosophical approaches and methods they would follow in their research and be prepared to support their decisions. The students must prepare a full bibliography, and be prepared to discuss any research problems that they might encounter in the project. For students who were registered as music-history majors, this exercise gave them the opportunity to begin preparations for the graduating essay, if they so choose.

At the time of writing this synopsis, the course is being offered for the fourth time. The enrolment has doubled from the first time the course was offered, and this at a time when a course on musicals was available as an upper-level elective! I take this a positive sign that students see the value of the subject. A previous class requested that more information on the writing and organization of research papers be given. To support this addition to the class, I have asked students to purchase Richard Wingell's *Writing about Music: An Introductory Guide* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990). The course appears to have served the needs of students. The class discussions encourage critical thinking and problem-solving methods, skills which should serve students well in their future endeavours. The major challenges of teaching the course are often in encouraging such discussion, but the results can also be the greatest reward. Certainly, I was pleased to read the observation in a student assignment that "doing research isn't too hard, when you know where to look."