

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
Division of Humanities & Social Sciences

Spring 2007  
Prof. Tom Neenan

**Mu 25 History of Chamber Music**

Location: 19 Baxter

Time tbd

Office: 11 Dabney (ext. 4072)

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office hours: M, W, 9:00 – 10:15 or by appointment

**Course Focus**

The course is intended for students who are part of a chamber music ensemble at Caltech and is designed to give those students a deeper understanding and appreciation of the piece or pieces which are in preparation for performance during the Spring concert offerings of the chamber music ensembles. The course will consist of student presentations on the pieces in preparation and other pieces, as assigned by the instructor; in-class listening, viewing and comparison of chamber music performances. Students who are not participating in a chamber music ensemble may enroll and will have similar assignments etc. to those who are.

**Requirements**

Students are required to:

Attend class regularly and consistently. If an insurmountable conflict arises with class time or other requirements, the student must confer with the instructor. This class will be conducted in a seminar-like manner; all are expected to attend and participate in all aspects of the course and class meetings.

Students will offer two 20-30 minute in-class presentations (see below)

Students will write a set of program notes for the concert in which they will perform (see below)

**Concert attendance**

Students will be required to attend three **professionally performed** chamber music or orchestral concerts during the term and write a report on each concert (concert report guidelines are available on the course website). A list of concerts that will fulfill this requirement will be circulated at the beginning of the term and updated periodically. The final grade of students failing to fulfill this requirement will be negatively impacted.

## **Presentations Guidelines**

General guidelines

- 20-30 minutes in length
- include audio material
- supply written outline of your talk to the class (18 copies)
- may use divisional projector for PowerPoint or other audio-visual presentation by prior arrangement with Prof. Neenan (optional)

### **Outline draft**

You **must** supply a draft outline of your presentation to Prof. Neenan **one week** prior to your presentation. Consideration will be given to those presenting in the first couple of weeks of the term. **No other exceptions.**

**What to cover** (some points will be more appropriate/applicable than others)

Material to be covered will vary widely, depending on the piece or pieces and its or their place in the composer's output. In all cases, include the following:

- general characteristics of the piece or pieces (very brief description, see below re "describing a piece of music"
- when and where it or they were composed
- any known impetus for the composition (commission, planned publication, performer request etc.)
- any interesting or enlightening information about the compositional process (did the piece cause the composer a lot of trouble or was it dashed off in a hurry? was the piece revised? when, why, how?)
- if speaking of a single piece, relationship of the work to other chamber music pieces by the composer; if speaking of a group of works, their place in the composer's output
- circumstances of the composer at the time of composition (early, middle, late; any particular influences or life circumstances that may have influenced the composition of the piece); if speaking of a group of works, were the pieces spread out over many years or fairly concentrated?
- first performance, if known; dedication, if any; financial results, if known
- public reception of the work(s) if applicable; reviews or critical commentary around the time of the performance or later
- interesting or unusual characteristics of the piece, including unusual ordering or sequence of movements; movement titles; performance directions
- special challenges, if any, to the performers
- if you feel it would be interesting or useful to others, you may compare portions of two performances of the same piece, being cognizant of the time constraints (I have ordered historic performances of some of the pieces to be presented and will make a list available)

### **What not to cover**

- the form or general characteristics of specific movements unless they are in some way unusual or otherwise interesting; ie don't "describe" the piece with phrases such as, "the cello enters at the beginning, followed by the

violin;” or “the exposition is 35 measures long and the development is 19 measures long,” or “the 2<sup>nd</sup> violin has a really beautiful melody near the end of the recapitulation.” These sorts of descriptions are generally not illustrative of a piece of music. This is not to say that interesting musical ideas or interesting or important points in the music should not be pointed out by way of recording (or live demonstration, if you like). Just don’t describe what is better heard. “**A (sound) picture is worth 1000 words.**”

- the complete biographical history of the composer

### **Program notes**

Program notes should contain much of the same types of background material that you offer in your presentation but in an engaging, lively and interesting written form with a general audience in mind (complex theoretical discussions are not appropriate or necessary).

Notes should be no **less than 2 single-spaced pages and no more than 3 single-spaced pages.**

A draft of your notes **must be provided 2 weeks** before your scheduled concert so that I may read and comment on them and you may make revisions. I may require that you submit a 2<sup>nd</sup> draft.

Notes should be created in MSWord and emailed to me at [neenan@hss.caltech.edu](mailto:neenan@hss.caltech.edu). Include your notes both as an attachment (Word document) and in the body of the email in case problems occur with opening your document)

Notes must be well organized (writing a preliminary outline is strongly encouraged); well-written (grammatically correct) and carefully spell-checked.

Your notes should be fun and interesting to read. They should contain a good balance of well-researched and well-thought out (scholarly) commentary and interesting and fun anecdotes about the composer, the piece, the circumstances, etc.

Again, and very importantly, they should not offer a blow by blow description of the sequence of musical events in the piece. That is quite boring and we don’t want to hear or read it.

A sample of model program notes will be circulated for your perusal. You may also wish to visit the LA Philharmonic website ([laphil.org](http://laphil.org)) and click on any of the individual pieces to be played. Some notes, as you will see, are more interesting and helpful than others.

### **Resources:**

Several books about chamber music have been placed on reserve in Dabney Library for this class, including:

Homer, Ulrich. Chamber Music, 1966

Grumbach, Dorish. Chamber Music, 1979

Cobbett, Walter. Cobbett's Cyclopedic survey of chamber music, 1929  
Loft, Abram. Ensemble! A rehearsal guide to thirty great works of chamber music, 1992  
Kenyon, Nicholas. Authenticity and early music: a symposium, 1988  
Tovey, Donald. Essays in musical analysis: chamber music, 1944  
Slonimsky, Nicolas. Music since 1900, 1971  
Slonimsky, Nicolas. Lexicon of musical invective: critical assaults on composers since Beethoven's time, 1965  
Shaw, Bernard. Shaw's music: the complete musical criticism in three volumes, 1995  
Taruskin, Richard. Text and Act: essays on music and performance, 1995

Permanent reserve:

The New Grove Dictionary of Music (permanent reserve) is a hugely helpful resource. Be sure to look up not only entries on the composer and genre (ie "string quartet") but also entries on the country of the composer's origin (which will often contain interesting material about the national style) or even cities, if applicable, ie "Vienna," "Paris" etc.

**Use the bibliographies in the New Grove** to lead you to other interesting and helpful sources to be found in the library. For example, the section on "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" contains a section on "art music" in the Soviet Union. It's bibliography contains several recent books in English dealing with Shostakovich and Khatachaturian.

Other entries will be equally helpful but it will require some digging on your part. **START RESEARCHING EARLY!!!**

Also, the New Grove exists on the web and can be used without subscription for limited use.

Oxford History of Music, ed. Richard Tarushkin. Like the Grove, comprehensive and extremely helpful.

Another helpful website is [www.andante.com](http://www.andante.com) which can also be used in limited ways without subscription.

Baker, Theodore. Baker's biographical dictionary of musicians, 1992  
Also extremely useful