

Rethinking the Music History Research Paper Assignment

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Many final term papers can be disappointing to read because they are badly written, reflecting inadequate preparation, poor planning, or a paucity of discipline-specific research or writing skills. A lack of engagement with the subject matter often compounds technical or critical-thinking problems. Indeed, one of the biggest frustrations for a music history teacher can be to read final projects that display little or no enthusiasm.

The final term paper has traditionally been held as a measurement of students' abilities in music history classes. While it is a valuable assignment for those interested in pursuing careers in musicology, its use is limited for anyone outside of academia; for many students, learning the academic "lingo" is only necessary for graduation and will soon be forgotten. The assignments—and even music history courses in general—have sometimes been viewed as irrelevant or as an impediment to careers by music students at conservatories or other institutions who consider history courses as necessary but uninteresting and time-consuming requirements toward graduation while primarily studying to perfect their craft as performers, composers, music educators, or band teachers. Some of these students exert a minimal amount of effort on their final history projects so that they can focus on what matters most to them from a professional standpoint.

Indeed, the lack of enthusiasm about music history final research assignments is in many cases because of the limits of the traditional ten to fifteen page research paper, which reviews a "historical" topic based on published and musicological scholarship, and presents it in a paper-only format. J. Peter Burkholder's thoughtfully crafted and detailed description of a sample research paper assignment provided in his article about peer learning, exemplifies this traditional approach:

Write a research paper, ten to fifteen pages in length, on a specific topic related to music in European culture before 1750 and appropriate to the objectives of this course. Your paper must be a detailed study of whatever topic is selected, it must have a single main point and a convincing

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argument, and it must represent your own independent work and thinking, reflecting both thorough research and original interpretation.¹

In a format that favors text without other forms of media, traditional final research papers rarely take advantage of contemporary technology beyond digitized score examples or images. This has been true in my own experience, even when I encourage electronic paper submissions via e-mail or course websites. While it is possible to provide links to sound clips and videos in papers, other formats are better suited to visual and aural media, and these media, in turn, are a valuable way to document the music under discussion. This is especially the case with contemporary topics dealing with music and media, such as interactive video game music, film music, or cartoon music. It is also helpful for papers dealing with performance topics.

Why not use students' experience as performers or teachers in conjunction with the academic type of knowledge gleaned through research, analysis, and critical interpretation when crafting music history assignments? Why not encourage students who are comfortable with technology to take advantage of their skill by giving options for these assignments—for instance, that they turn in a DVD with a paper, create a multi-media project, or submit a YouTube link to a film they have created? Our assignments can help students think, reason, and research while serving a practical purpose and embracing the musical experience too. *Topics* can encompass the ways that most music students use music history professionally even while *formats* of the projects incorporate new technology. Professional musicians need to rely on musico-historical knowledge to provide context while giving private lessons, writing program notes, creating classroom lesson plans, designing websites, planning band concert programs, interpreting new pieces, or composing for film scores, postmodernist compositions, or progressive rock music. These uses for musico-historical knowledge invite alternative music history projects that could be more relevant to certain students' lives and careers.

Summary of the Literature

This article is certainly not the first to address problems surrounding the final research paper assignment in music history classrooms. Several recent music history pedagogy articles have addressed the topic of how to improve the *quality* of final research papers. Given the multiplicity of issues involved, the articles have approached the topic from different angles. Pamela Starr, for instance, has already vividly diagnosed and described many of the typical problems with student papers:

1. J. Peter Burkholder, "Peer Learning in Music History Courses," in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 208.

An even more discouraging sight, if possible, than the expanse of somnolent students during a lecture is the stack of undergraduate “research” papers awaiting our attention during the final days of the semester. We know what to expect from these papers: the clumsy parody of historical material drawn from the least appropriate authors; the mind-numbing, bar-by-bar musical description that passes for stylistic analysis; the stilted and pretentious language; the naïve interpretation and conclusions.²

Starr concludes that the students are simply not prepared for sophisticated scholarly discourse, and they need more guidance. She advocates the practice of journaling in the classroom, so that students can chronicle their encounter with a new piece of music and begin their research early in the semester, while garnering critical feedback throughout the writing process.³

Carol Hess focuses on the poor quality of the writing and on correcting deficiencies, seeking solutions to the main question posed in her article: “Why can’t college students write?”⁴ Her most concrete suggestions for improving the quality of writing include requiring outlines, annotated bibliographies, and a rough draft before submission of the final version.⁵ These activities can have a significant impact on the quality of the final research papers because they help students plan in advance and learn discipline specific ways of thinking, researching, and writing. However, for some students, the biggest impediment to writing a good research paper is a lack of real engagement with the project as they fail to see its importance for their lives and careers. Many students need personal motivation and excitement about the project to invest the time needed to do their best work. They need to connect with the material and understand its relevance.

Hess already noted this problem with student engagement, which she attributed, in part, to the seeming disparity between historical subject matter and current culture.⁶ Melanie Lowe similarly called the issue of relevance a major challenge for music educators, and suggested several ways writing projects could bridge the cultural gap to prompt student enthusiasm:

The real challenge for teachers of music history is to put history in direct dialogue with our contemporary every day lives—to make music history not just musically relevant, spiritually relevant, psychologically relevant, even ecologically relevant not just in the “there and then” of history but in the “here and now” of today. In other words, our musical-historical

2. Pamela Starr, “Teaching in the Centrifugal Classroom,” in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 172.

3. Starr, “Centrifugal Classroom,” 173–74.

4. Carol Hess, “Score and Word: Writing About Music,” in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 199.

5. Hess, “Score and Word,” 200–1.

6. Hess, “Score and Word,” 199.

teaching needs to reach our students in ways that profoundly impact their existence as twenty-first century citizens of Planet Earth.⁷

As Lowe has suggested, rethinking the way subject matter is presented is crucial in bridging the cultural gap and making the material seem more relevant. Yet just as relevant is making the connection between the music students produce and music history. Rethinking the *topics* and *formats* of music history assignments—especially of the final research project—can help students make this connection.⁸

The musical experience of listening to or producing music invokes emotional and physical responses rarely duplicated during the academic quest to discover intellectual knowledge about a piece of music, and often neglected in theoretical or historical discussions of music. Carolyn Abbate has argued for a reconsideration of the importance of the experience of music making and live music in musicological discourse, claiming that it too conveys a form of knowledge.⁹ And while scholars have creatively used knowledge gleaned from the act of making music (or listening) to inform their scholarly arguments in recent years, a prime example being Elisabeth LeGuin's multimedia *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (book and CD), in which she explores how the physical experience of making music sheds light on Luigi Boccherini and his compositions, few encourage this and other alternative methodologies and formats for research projects assigned in undergraduate or graduate survey courses and seminars.¹⁰ Yet this is indeed another way to reinstate and encourage a synthesis of performance and music history in or through the music history classroom, as Daniel Barolsky and others have recently discussed in their online roundtable forum.¹¹

New Approach Applied

Seeking to make music history classes relevant for undergraduate and graduate music majors at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where the

7. Melanie Lowe "Teaching Music History Today: Making Tangible Connections to Here and Now," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 1, no. 1 (2010): 47, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/17/24>.

8. Lowe hinted at this with her suggestion of journaling. This article suggests a few more possibilities.

9. Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 505–36.

10. Elisabeth Leguin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

11. Daniel Barolsky, et. al., "Performance as a Master Narrative in Music History" *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 77–102, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/79/103>.

majority of undergraduate music majors are performers or else studying to become certified music educators, I offer an alternative to the traditional final research paper assignment that encourages topics more closely aligned with the interests and career goals of the students and formats that make use of modern technology. This alternative assignment has also worked effectively in my music history graduate seminars, which include a blend of Masters and PhD students in several disciplines: music education, music history, music theory, composition, conducting, and performance.

In my undergraduate survey courses and graduate history seminars, students have the option of writing a traditional research paper *OR* choosing an alternative format. I encourage students to capitalize on their expertise as performers, theorists, composers, or educators in combination with knowledge gathered through research and analysis. In addition, I encourage them to make use of technology in their assignments. The syllabus describes the assignment:

Final Paper or Creative Project: Select a topic of interest, research about it, and write a final term paper (ten to twenty pages for graduate students and five to ten pages for undergraduate students). Alternatively, propose a creative project, such as a videotaped lecture recital with extensive and focused program notes, lesson plan, blog site, emulation composition, website, or other multi-media project that in some way relates to your major concentration and with music related to the topic of the class. Your project must involve some research and writing, and it may employ a variety of methodologies.

For my undergraduate survey students, many of whom had little experience conducting creative research projects, I add the following (more specific) guidelines:

All projects must have a clear and creative focus and be narrow enough in scope to successfully deal with your selected topic in the allotted amount of space. Following are a few guidelines for you to consider as you prepare your projects:

1. Provide necessary background information. (Choose only relevant information, and be brief).
2. State a clear goal, question, or focus for your project toward the beginning.
3. Delineate main points related to your question, and use these as the basis for the organizational structure.
4. Explain the results of your investigation about the topic/question in the main body of the paper/project.
5. Provide specific/concrete examples. If you are supplementing your paper with technology, make sure to provide specific references in the written work to the technology. Include illustrations, tables, or score examples where appropriate.

6. Draw on your experience as a performer, composer, or teacher, as you write. Combine both “head” knowledge gleaned through research and “practical” knowledge learned through experience.
7. Include a bibliography or works cited list. This should include reliable sources, such as *New Grove Dictionary* and other library databases, books, etc. *Wikipedia* and many other websites that are not peer reviewed are NOT reliable sources.
8. Citation Format: Choose your own citation style, but be consistent throughout.

Traditional and alternative projects in my classes have benefited from many of the writing suggestions proposed by Hess, in particular, that of creating proposals, drafts, and bibliographies. For my graduate students, I require an annotated bibliography and short project proposal by the middle of the term:

Write a description of your proposed final project (250–500 words). Describe the suggested topic and the format for your project. Make a case for its importance, describe your proposed methodologies, and include a working bibliography/ discography. Briefly summarize each item in the bibliography/discography and its relevance for your paper.

The week (or two) before final projects are due, graduate students also give oral presentations in class so that they can receive verbal suggestions from their classmates and written feedback from me.

For my large undergraduate lecture class, it is not feasible assign proposals in the middle of the term. However, students give five-minute oral presentations related to their final projects in class throughout the semester. Their presentations are mini portraits of their final, in-progress projects. Students describe their topics, outline their main methodologies, and provide brief but concrete examples of their findings. Many times they give brief performances in class during their reports. This helps students get a head start on their research and allows me to provide verbal and written feedback before they start writing.

I will briefly summarize a few of the alternative projects undergraduate and graduate students have created for my classes. These have varied in format from program notes to websites to documentary videos, have made use of a variety of technologies, and have relied on diverse research methodologies. Many of the students creating non-traditional final projects have told me in person and in student evaluations that the alternate and more practical format was more motivating than the traditional written paper.

*Historical Performance Project*¹²

A vocal performance major taking my graduate opera survey seminar decided to connect her research project with her planned staging of a scene from John Blow's *Venus and Adonis* (c. 1683) in her Master's Recital. Desiring to create a historically informed performance, she was responsible for every detail of the staging, including the vocal rehearsals, costumes, and stage movement. Researching the general topic of historically informed performance practice would have had relevance for her, but it has been done before. She instead chose a more focused research topic about one aspect of the staging—gesture. She examined primary and secondary sources and combined the information she found there with practical knowledge gained from experience. She documented the results with a written paper in the form of extended program notes and with an accompanying DVD, and she and several chorus members performed an excerpt of the scene in class.

For her project, the voice student relied on a variety of methodologies. She studied primary source material, such as treatises and artwork from the era, including the libretto, John Bulwer's *Chirologia or the Natural Language of the Hand*, and contemporaneous visual art (such as Peter Paul Ruben's *Venus and Adonis* [1635]). Her research also involved interviewing Early Music or Baroque specialists, including Daniel Carberg, Matthew Leese, Drew Minter, and Robert Eisenstein. Finally, she also looked at other contemporaneous historical performances, including those by the New Brunswick Early Music Festival.¹³

The voice student used many of her discoveries about gesture in her tasteful production, relying on contemporaneous paintings of Venus and Adonis for costuming models, including color choices. She also implemented her research on gesture by including the use of motions for “grief” or “shame” (the hands sliding down the face), as the gesture for the word “mourn.” The student had chorus members make different gestures depending upon where their sympathies lay (with Venus or Adonis).

At the same time, she combined material drawn from her research with performative knowledge as she explored the relationship between theory and practice; she synthesized knowledge of historical theory with an eye for what worked on the stage. This combination was reflected in her writing and in

12. I am grateful to William Baldoumas, Lisa DiGiusto, Samantha Gambaccini, Javier Luengo-Garrido, Rachel MacKenzie, Ruth Myamoto, and Patrick Watson for their permission to summarize their projects in this article.

13. Mark Clauge previously suggested having students conduct interviews, transcribe them, and publish them on the web as a way of teaching students how to be music researchers. Mark Clauge, “Publishing Student Work on the Web: *The Living Music Project* and the Imperatives of the New Literacy,” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 62, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/48/81>.

performance. In her writing, she explained the process of staging, and how the performance further contributed knowledge not conveyed through research. For instance, she learned, based on experience, about the need for firmer wrists to convey energy: “If done correctly with a firm, powerful wrist, the hand is at the service of the text spoken, and also able to indicate the inner-dialogue of the actor when he is not speaking.”¹⁴

Rather than turning in a traditional research paper replete with introduction, thesis, main body, and conclusions, the student placed her findings in an alternative format—extended program notes—yet not traditional notes explaining the history of the composition and other background details. They instead focused on a history of this particular staging; they relayed the student’s findings about Baroque gesture and how this knowledge was incorporated into the performance. It also documented the rehearsal process and the ways different types of gestures were implemented in various scenes for diverse characters and situations. The student included illustrations, including contemporaneous paintings juxtaposed to photos from the student’s production illustrating gestural positions. A DVD of the scene from the students Master’s recital accompanied the program notes.

Website Project

Several of my undergraduate students elected to create multi-media websites about historical topics for their final projects in lieu of traditional final research papers.¹⁵ Although the websites tend to be more informational than critical or interpretive, students have still been able to approach topics creatively using this format.

A cello performance major, for instance, created a website about the history of the koto in my undergraduate survey course covering classical, jazz, popular, and world music in the twentieth century. The topic had relevance for the student, because she had family members who played the instrument and was learning to play it herself.

The website on the koto was mainly informational. It included a brief overview of the instrument, a page about the instrument’s construction and parts, an overview of the different types of koto instruments, a page about koto music and notation, and a page about traditional koto music in contrast to the music composed for it today. Taken together, these different pages could have formed subsections in an informational research paper about the koto.

14. Unpublished paper for MUS 505: University of Massachusetts Amherst, May 2012.

15. Mark Clague has already mentioned the benefits of online websites as educational tools: “Youtube, Flickr, Wikis of all sorts, and other web-based html authoring tools can give educational work the added value and impact of publication and thus inspire students to take their work to a higher level.” Clague, “Publishing Student Work on the Web,” 74.

The website format allowed for the writing to be supplemented by many additional illustrations as well as some sound files and video links that brought the information “to life.” Moreover, the separation of topics into individual pages organized the material and made it easy to follow.

Although much of the material falls under the category of readily accessible general knowledge, the student creatively contributed a comparison of historical versus contemporary use of the koto supplemented by video clips of traditional, experimentalist, and popular pieces featuring the koto. The student’s website page on koto notation also included images of notation for traditional koto music as well as commentary, explaining how to interpret these forms of notation, which consist primarily of numbers and cubes read from top to bottom.

Lesson Plan Project

In my undergraduate music survey course covering music from 1700–1900, one double major in music (with emphases in piano and voice) and anthropology decided to write a traditional research paper about slave songs. She supplemented the research paper with a related lesson plan. In the research paper, the student used an interdisciplinary approach to delineate differences between African and American traditions and their synthesis in slave music in terms of language/speech patterns, culture/community, and musical style. Focusing on the evolution of African music within American culture, she relied upon conventional research methods to describe traditional instruments and song styles.

This student’s supplemental seven-day lesson plan was designed for a middle school music history class. Her objective was to teach about African-American music in history and how it has evolved to the present in terms of genres, styles, and instruments. In her lesson plan, which she hoped to coordinate with the middle school world history curriculum, she detailed specific objectives and activities to cover over a seven-day period. Her approach was very “hands on,” with students learning to play new instruments. It also sought to make the topic relevant, by covering modern musical styles rooted in African traditions.

The student’s lesson plan outlined specific activities for each day. For example, the first day was to be mainly informational, with a discussion of the country and culture, the different musical styles, and the instruments:

Day 1: Geography Lesson. Present a map of African continents and discuss regions and countries in Africa. Then give an overview of slave trade, as the students would have already learned some in their history classes.

- For “fun” quiz—pass out a worksheet with a color-in map and images of traditional African instruments. This is for students to test their knowledge of the African continent and the instruments that may be

found there. Not to be graded, other than participation. After, discuss if they were surprised by how little/much they know. Fifteen minutes.

- Listen to interpretations of traditional African music, listen to current African music and talk about similarities and differences. Fifteen minutes.
- Activity: Thumb Pianos, Sticks, Drums—Create your own song about your friends, family, or a story. After, describe what the content of traditional songs is—discuss similarities and differences. Quickly grade the Africa map and instrument quiz to hand back. Perform for each other. Thirty minutes.
- Hand out a filled-in study guide of the African continent and instruments. Ask students to study it for five to ten minutes each night this week. Ask them to bring in a specific song they like and write one short paragraph about what they hear. Do they think it relates at all to African Music?¹⁶

Source Reading Project

An advanced undergraduate opera singer and a music historian, inspired by Pierro Weiss' source readings in opera, (*Opera: A History in Documents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) decided to create his own set of source readings for a contemporary opera with a local setting (Northampton, Massachusetts), Eric Sawyer's *Garden of Martyrs* for his final project in my opera survey course, rather than to write a critical paper on a historical topic of a distant location. The rationale behind the project was that few people can predict who the next Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Richard Wagner, or Giuseppe Verdi will be, and in this digital age of e-mail, facebook, and instant messaging, many composers' deeper ideas and thoughts might not be preserved and/or made readily accessible for future generations of scholars.

The student scheduled interviews with the composer and librettist Harley Erdman, crafting thoughtful questions based on his own knowledge of the opera and singers. The student recorded and subsequently transcribed the interviews, including time indications. He then offered his own written commentary about the interviews.

The interviews covered topics as diverse as educational and musical influences, the compositional process, how the composer approaches composition with specific singers in mind, the resonance of the historical topic with current political events, the relationship between the opera libretto and the novel that served as its source material, and differences between theater and opera. One sample question was about how singers influenced the compositional process:

16. Unpublished lesson plan for Middle School ages 10–13, MUS 301: University of Massachusetts Amherst, May 2011.

One of the interesting things for me is after the performance you were able to talk with the audience, and one of the points that you made was the importance of being able to work with specific voices, with specific singers. If we go back, Verdi used to do the same, Mozart used to compose for specific singers. What does that really mean? How do you approach the composition process having in mind specific singers, singers with two sides of the coin: singers with limitations, probably a really good voice and a lot of “pro,” but some “cons” too. How do you work with that?¹⁷

In his response, Sawyer provided specific details about how knowledge of the singer’s strengths impacted the evolution of character roles and the creation of vocal parts. In particular, he mentioned that it affected choices about the range, and the style or intensity of the music during the compositional process.

The student’s questions displayed critical thinking, careful preparation, and research about the piece and composer. Moreover, he created his own primary source material that provided a glimpse into the creators’ minds.

Program Notes and Recital Project

Several other students opted to create more traditional sets of historical program notes accompanied by recordings for their final projects. One undergraduate vocal performance major, for instance, was interested in Jenny Lind’s performances and reception. For my undergraduate music survey course, she created extended program notes providing background information about Jenny Lind’s career, which supplemented a program featuring Jenny Lind’s signature arias. Her particular creative focus was in documenting the Jenny Lind craze (“Lindomania” or “Jenny Lind Rage”), including the mad crowd surges to get tickets to her concerts, the naming of many objects and places in her honor, including the Jenny Lind crib and Jenny Lind Crossroads in North Carolina, and the naming of dances in her honor. This student, for instance, noted that the crossroads were named after Lind when, while her stagecoach was being repaired, Lind gave an impromptu performance under an oak tree.

The program notes accompanied her recording of several of Lind’s signature arias, including George Friedrich Handel’s “I Know That My Redeemer Liveth,” which she learned specifically for the project. She also learned, danced, and recorded the “Jenny Lind Polka,” in an effort to bring back to life some of the music created in memory of Jenny Lind. She turned in both a DVD of her performances with her written program notes as her paper project.

17. Unpublished interview with Eric Sawyer for MUS 505: University of Massachusetts Amherst, May 2012.

Film Score Project

An undergraduate composer taking my survey course (covering music from 1700-1900) was creating a film score for a cartoon and decided to create a documentary video following his compositional decisions during the process. He created a supplementary written paper documenting the project as well. The documentary and the cartoons were handed in via YouTube.

The cartoon was about a boy named Billy Bubbles and his attraction to a girl. In the documentary and in the paper, the student described how his film score was informed by his understanding of Wagnerian leitmotifs and their constant variation and development throughout the score in reaction to the drama:

Common techniques in varying leitmotifs include changing the mode, rhythmic augmentation and diminution, melodic fragmentation and extension, inverting and retrograding the melody, varying instrumentation, re-harmonization, etc. In “Billy Bubbles,” I made use of changing Billy’s leitmotif from major (happy, pleasant) to minor (sad, severe, ominous) when he contemplates stealing. I changed the instrumentation of Billy’s leitmotif from piano and strings to acoustic guitar, to fit his surroundings at a hip thrift store.¹⁸

Emulation Composition Project

A graduate student majoring in trombone performance decided to write a symphonic poem melding ideals of the New German school with developing variation for my seminar in Romantic music for graduate students. This composition was accompanied by a research paper in which the student documented the compositional process and the way he translated the program into sound.

Entitled *Ragnarök: Twilight of the Gods*, the tone poem was based on an ancient Norse myth also used by Wagner in *Götterdämmerung*. The student researched ancient Norse instruments and emulated their sound qualities by modern orchestral instruments in his composition to create an “exotic” effect within a Germanic stylistic framework. He used a harp to imitate the sounds of the lyre, the high register of the French horn imitated the bukkehorn, and the cello, playing within the Phrygian scale to imitate the Finnish jouhikko. The student also conducted research about ancient Norse melodies and included one in its entirety that he discovered in the *Codex Runicus*.

This student’s research took into account recent scholarship as well as his personal analyses of compositions. Based on the model of New German School composers, the student used the program to determine a unique compositional structure, and also used several imitative effects. Relying on a list of

18. Unpublished final project for MUS 392M: University of Massachusetts Amherst, May 2011.

all possible types of variations from Walter Frisch's "Brahms: Developing Variation, and the Schoenberg Critical Tradition,"¹⁹ while adding retrograde, inversion, augmentation, diminution, and harmonic variation, the student also included sections dominated by developing variation. The student turned in a score, recording, and final research paper.

Problems and Challenges

Although the majority of students in my classes still choose to write traditional research papers (about seventy-five percent), a minority appreciated the option to create non-traditional research projects. The majority of the alternative projects were exceptional. Many of the creative projects displayed more careful planning, more extensive preparation, and greater attention to detail than traditional projects produced by the same students in other classes. I found that most students choosing the alternative formats typically wrote just as much or more and consulted just as many or more sources than students did with traditional research papers. One student, for instance wrote a traditional fourteen-page paper in one class, and a twenty-three-page alternative project plus DVD in another. The quality of the writing, of the sources consulted, and the logic of the argument was far superior in the alternative project. Moreover, the alternative format was a catalyst for creative and original thinking as it sparked the interest of non-music history majors.

However, not all of the creative alternative projects completed by my students were stellar. Some of the projects still suffered from apathy and the writing and critical thinking issues so common for music history assignments. My initial fear when offering the alternative format option was that the alternative project formats would be viewed as a way to circumvent the "harder" discipline of writing a critical and creative research paper. That did happen, but in a minority of cases. I will provide a fictitious example that closely mirrors a most disappointing case. The student was conducting "research" about a ballet choreographer who revolutionized ballet and inspired several new pieces of music. The student submitted a link to a video featuring himself "demonstrating" the new choreography. In reality it consisted of little more than random arm movements and body gestures that had nothing to do with the choreography in question. No music was even included in the background, and the recording quality was poor. It was likely recorded in haste with a mobile device. The student turned in a three-page (and badly written) encyclopedia entry-style paper with no footnotes or cited sources about the choreographer. Moreover, there was no mention of music in the written project.

19. *19th-Century Music* 5, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 215–32.

One of the biggest challenges was establishing a grading rubric with which to evaluate projects that encompassed such diversity of formats and topics. In particular, I debated about whether and how to grade the performance aspect and the quality of the digital aspects of multi-media projects. It was also a challenge to decide how a documentary project of source readings measures up against traditional research papers in which criticism is so important.

In the end I chose to focus on four general categories that were common to all projects, each worth roughly twenty-five percent of the final grade: creativity, content, style/organization, and quality. These categories, left intentionally flexible, apply to written and performative work. I created several questions to help during the evaluation process:

1. Creativity:

- Is the student addressing a new question, or an old question in a new way?
- Does the student articulate a clear rationale for their project and situate it within what has already been done?

2. Content:

- Does the student cover in detail the aspects crucial to the topic?
- Does the student include only what is relevant?
- Are the student's facts straight, well-argued, and accurate?
- Does the student use appropriate and effective methodologies?
- If there is a multi-media component, how does it relate to, inform, and/or embody the ideas expressed in the written work?
- Does the student use and reference the best possible sources?

3. Style and Organization:

- Does the student write or perform with nuance, class, and flair?
- Is there a clear and logical structure to the writing, performance and/or composition?

4. Quality:

- Is the final project pleasing to the ear/eye (this includes the layout and format of a paper and the preparedness of a performance)?
- Writing Mechanics: Is the syntax correct?
- Are word choices, punctuation, grammar, etc. the best possible?

Conclusions

Most of my students will never need to write a music history research paper in traditional format after they graduate. In choosing a more pragmatic approach to music history projects, the students who do not like the traditional format can combine praxis and theory, or musicology and musicking while channeling the new technologies of our age to do so.

True, many of these projects would not help students gain admittance to graduate studies in musicology or be published in a journal. However, there are many venues and needs for musico-historical research that extend beyond the confines of the narrow scholarly realm of academia. In thinking outside the academic box with their projects, quite a few of my students made the connection between music history as taught and music history as applied outside the walls of the university and academic system. Moreover, many of the students were excited about their projects and were able to combine writing and technology in creative ways.

It might be going too far to state that students were in a state of wonderment when they created their projects, the same kind of wonderment I get when I hold an old long-sought after manuscript in my hands or complete an article expressing an original idea. Yet in creating projects of personal interest in formats that are useful, these students will hopefully have learned something new, been excited about it, and be more likely to investigate history in the future. If that is the case, these alternative projects have been a success and have better prepared the students for life in the future.