INFORMATION LITERACY IN MUSIC
An Instructor's Companion

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1
APPLIED MUSIC

Information literacy is an essential attribute for performers. Applied musicians need to find and evaluate editions of printed music, locate and assess a variety of recorded performances, find historical background and context, and tap into a variety of pedagogical approaches. Although the assignments in this chapter are written for specific areas of performance, many of their underlying principles are easily adapted for diverse performing media: the skills and methodology they impart are transferrable. These assignments take musical scholarship out of the traditional classroom and bring the importance of information literacy to the practice room, the performance hall, and beyond.

CONTEMPORARY VIOLA MUSIC: TOP PICKS FROM THE OBERLIN CONSERVATORY VIOLA STUDIO

KATHLEEN A. ABROMEIT

Introduction

The Oberlin Conservatory offers individual private lessons in all areas of instrumental and vocal study. Viola students have individual lessons as well as weekly studio classes and an occasional class with the entire string division throughout the year. The viola studio consists of undergraduate viola performance majors ranging from first year to fourth. The assignment focuses on repertoire discovery.

Student Learning Outcomes

During the students' first year at Oberlin, they have three scaffolded assignments in the introduction to music history course, so they have already been introduced to the facility and staff and have completed a somewhat extensive assignment using our online catalog. They have also completed assignments that require the use of *Grove Music Online* as well as the use of databases to locate secondary literature (*Music Index, RILM*). Building on these previously-developed skills, repertoire discovery is an important skill for the performer as they transition to the professional world. With that in mind, students will learn to:

- Identify and locate contemporary compositions.
- Evaluate repertoire.
- Understand citation style.
- Create an annotated bibliography.

ASSIGNMENT

This assignment requires students to find and critically evaluate scores and recordings for five contemporary compositions for viola or viola and piano. It aligns with the "Information has Value" frame in the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. Performing musicians understand the music marketplace, and their place in it. They would like to be paid for their creative efforts, and also want some control over their artistic work. With that in mind, repertoire discovery is a tool used when working towards the goal of professional readiness.

CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

The class meets in the Conservatory Library's electronic classroom. The teaching is collaborative with the viola faculty member, and time is divided evenly between the librarian and the viola teacher.

(1) Searching OBIS (The Oberlin College online library catalog)—using subject headings such as:
    Viola and piano music—20th century
    Viola music—20th century
    or doing keyword searches using terms such as "viola contemporary"
(2) Using webpages such as viola.com, the New Music USA Online Library (http://library.newmusicusa.org/), or other pages the students know that might include repertoire
(3) *DRAM* (http://www.dramonline.org/), using the instrument limiter of "viola"
(4) *Music Index*, using search terms such as "contemporary viola music" to locate reviews or announcements for recent publications
(5) Newspaper sources that might list concert reviews and new repertoire

The studio is quite small (with only fifteen students present), which can lead to a lot of discussion and input about search strategies and ideas.

Next, the viola teacher instructs the class on how to evaluate the piece and determine its difficulty rating. The teacher offers examples from common repertoire that are familiar, rating, for example, the William Walton viola concerto as a very difficult piece. The group discusses the Walton concerto, considering attributes like meter, key signature, tempo, rhythmic complexities, articulation, range, and dynamic levels. Modeling this kind of evaluation provides the students with a clearer idea of how they should approach the assignment.

ASSESSMENT

The success of this project is measured through peer assessment, which involves students grading the work of their peers with set criteria. The criteria used includes:

- Did the assignment contain five pieces?
- Was a citation for a score and recording included?

- Did the abstract include information about things like: meter, key signature, tempo, rhythmic complexities, articulation, range, and dynamic levels?
- Was a difficulty rating included?

No grades are given, but feedback is provided. This process transfers some ownership of the assessment to individual students, potentially increasing their motivation and engagement. In doing so, students are encouraged to learn more deeply, to build their understanding, and to gain insight into their own approach to assessment in comparison to their peers. This process may help students develop judgment skills, critical abilities, and self-awareness.

Future Plans for the Assignment

This assignment lends itself to using a bibliographic management tool where students can both gather the information and share it with the rest of the studio. Another option is using a cloud-based file sharing system such as Google Docs. Either way, students learn about collaborative research and tools that are available.

Ultimately, this kind of project can lead to publication, whether formal or informal. For example, the information could be added to a studio website or blog. If the platform were a library webpage or an online library guide, the students could, for example, include links to library holdings, and *Grove Music Online*.

CONTEMPORARY VIOLA MUSIC—ASSIGNMENT

With a relatively small and limited repertoire, it is a challenge to find quality repertoire for college-level performers. As such, it is important to share little-known or overlooked pieces. Please share some repertoire ideas with your studio mates. Seeking for new repertoire often means turning toward contemporary composers. With that in mind, use the library resources discussed in studio class and find five contemporary viola pieces to share. They need to be pieces that were written for viola or viola and piano. Do not include chamber music.

Provide a citation for the score and a citation for a recording if one exists. Please write brief annotations that include a difficulty rating considering things like: meter, key signature, tempo, rhythmic complexities, articulation, range, and dynamic levels. You may find some of this information in repertoire guides. Include a brief discussion of performance considerations, and a bibliography of available recordings. This evaluation will help you gain a deeper understanding of the work and as a result perform the piece with greater artistry. Whether it be a work written especially for the viola, like Atar Arad's viola sonata, or a transcribed piece, such as one of Bach's gamba sonatas, each can provide a learning and emotive experience for you and your audience. Be prepared to present your selections.