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The Seven Valleys for Orchestra and a Study of Music Composition Pedagogy

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THE SEVEN VALLEYS FOR ORCHEstra
AND
A STUDY OF MUSIC COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in
The School of Music

by
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B.A., University of Tehran, 2013
M.A., University of Tehran, 2015
M.M., Louisiana State University, 2019
August 2020
To my wonderful family for their unconditional love and continuous inspiration
especially my dear parents, Zahra and Reza, for their everlasting support
and
my beloved husband, Ahmad, for his limitless encouragement.
PREFACE

This dissertation has been and will be a great source of inspiration for my musical and academic career for two reasons. First, it has challenged both my musical and research skills, revealing new ways to develop my ideas. Second, it has provided me with invaluable materials for further work both musically and academically. In the future, I intend to expand the ideas in Part I of this dissertation into an opera as well as compile the perspectives of Part II into a comprehensive model of music composition pedagogy. I have truly loved both aspects from the very beginning of my studies, which has helped me stay inspired and motivated during the entire process.

I have always wanted to compose a large-scale work based on a masterpiece of Persian literature, and the scope of this dissertation seemed a perfect fit. I conducted extensive research on the available texts and reviewed many manuscripts. When I encountered The Conference of the Birds, I immediately realized that this text was the one I wanted to develop. The poem is so rich and imaginative that I could hear the musical ideas evoked by it right away. It took me a while to manage the specifics concerning the musical interpretation and the details of the process. I created schemes for each movement, outlining how it would feature the musical and literary content. Thus, the composition process went very smoothly as the objectives were already settled.

In addition, I have always been interested in learning about the methods and techniques of music pedagogy, especially with respect to composition. Therefore, I decided to research past and present perspectives on composition pedagogy and integrate them into a model. In particular, the opportunity to learn the views of different music/composition professors was
very helpful. I plan to further expand my knowledge on and research the most creative trends in music composition pedagogy.

Overall, I have experienced so much joy and satisfaction during every step of this process. I hope this dissertation opens new windows into the field of music composition and helps composers and scholars further expand their studies.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my Major Advisor and Committee Chair Dr. Dinos Constantinides, whose support, supervision, and encouragement were invaluable and limitless during this study and the entire degree program. My accomplishments would have not been possible without his dedication and commitment to expanding my knowledge and educating me as a composer. I would also like to thank my Minor Advisor and Committee Member Dr. Jeffrey Perry for his endless guidance and generous support during this study and beyond. I am truly grateful to Dr. Griffin Campbell, Committee Member; Dr. Jonathan Earle, the Dean’s Representative; and Dr. Joseph Skillen, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in Music and Theatre, for their very kind encouragement and support.

I would like to acknowledge the generosity and support of the professors who agreed to share their experience and expertise for this research: Drs. Stephen David Beck, Dinos Constantinides, Don Freund, Mara Gibson, Edward Jacobs, James Mobberley, Jeffrey Perry, and Paul Rudy, in alphabetical order. They helped open my mind to new perspectives and develop a pedagogical approach.

A very special note of thanks to Drs. David DeBoor Canfield, Al Benner, and Athanasios Zervas, who have provided considerable support to my career and helped me broaden my horizons.

I would also like to acknowledge my teachers in composition and related fields at the University of Tehran: Drs. Alireza Mashayekhi, Shahin Farhat, Amin Mahyar Tafreshipour, Amin Honarmand, Mohammad Reza Tafazzoli, Kiawasch SahebNassagh, and Azin Movahed, for their countless efforts to educate me as a musician and composer and help me achieve my goals.
Sincere thanks are extended to all my teachers, past and present, who have kindly helped me during my academic journey, especially Ms. Katayoun Kamrany for her inspiration and enlightenment, which opened my mind to the world of music.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Louisiana State University and the University of Tehran for being sweet homes to me for more than a decade and helping me reach this milestone.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation consists of two parts. The first part consists of an original orchestral work, *The Seven Valleys*, featuring seven movements, each of which presents various musical elements. The piece is a symphonic poem inspired by a chapter with the same name in the celebrated masterpiece of Persian literature, *The Conference of the Birds*, by the 12th-century poet Farid ud-Din Attar. The second part presents a study of music composition pedagogy, investigating past and present pedagogical practices in music composition. Chapter 3 provides a conceptual and historical examination of music composition pedagogy. Chapter 4 surveys the curriculum and methodology of a selection of music/composition professors. Chapter 5 presents an integrated model of music composition pedagogy, featuring an overview and examination of the data from Chapter 4 as well as perspectives from other resources and my own views.
PART I: *THE SEVEN VALLEYS FOR ORCHESTRA*
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introductory Notes

Niloufar Iravani

The Seven Valleys

for Orchestra

I. Quest

II. Love

III. Mystery

IV. Detachment and Serenity

V. Unity

VI. Awe

VII. Poverty and Nothingness

Duration: ca 21:00 minutes

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

2019–2020
Program Notes

*The Seven Valleys* is a symphonic poem inspired by a chapter with the same name in the celebrated masterpiece of Persian literature, *The Conference of the Birds*, by the 12th-century poet Farid ud-Din Attar.¹ *The Seven Valleys* uses many themes to represent the numerous birds in *The Conference of the Birds* as they embark on a journey to find the legendary Simorgh² and ask him to be the king of the birds of the world. The journey, led by the hoopoe, takes the birds through seven valleys—quest, love, mystery, detachment and serenity, unity, awe, and poverty and nothingness. In the piece, each valley is presented in a single movement with specific thematic/rhythmic structure and musical content. Only thirty birds pass through all seven valleys and reach the Simorgh’s home, which is a large lake in which they can see their own reflections. Once there, they realize that the Simorgh does not actually exist; rather, it is none other than themselves. The poem symbolizes the majesty of the beloved, which is like the sun that can be seen in a mirror’s reflection, and the need to delve below the surface into the depths to find the reality.

¹ According to the introduction to the English translation of *The Conference of the Birds* by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (published by Penguin Books), “The Conference of the birds (Manteg at-Tair) is the best-known work of Farid ud-Din Attar, a Persian poet who was born at some time during the twelfth century in Nishapur (where Omar Khayyam was also born) in north-east Iran.”

² Simorgh is a mythical bird in Iranian mythology and literature, sometimes equated to the phoenix. The word “Simorgh” literally means “Thirty Birds” in Persian (Farsi) language, consisting of “Si,” meaning “Thirty,” and “Morph,” meaning “Bird”. It is obvious that Attar played with both the literal and conceptual meanings of the word Simorgh to convey the allegorical message of the poem.
Insights and Analysis

*The Seven Valleys* is a collection of seven movements, named Quest, Love, Mystery, Detachment and Serenity, Unity, Awe, and Poverty and Nothingness, each 2.5 to 3.5 minutes in length. The first, third, and fifth movements (Quest, Mystery, and Unity) feature fast tempos, energetic themes, and predominantly the full orchestra, while the second, fourth, and sixth movements (Love, Detachment and Serenity, and Awe) present slow tempos, lyrical themes, and various solo passages. The last movement, Poverty and Nothingness, plays the role of a cadenza that ends the piece with a spiritual connotation.

Regarding the philosophical and spiritual content of *The Conference of the Birds*, the birds are identified as different species that indicate different types of humans. For example, the nightingale is the lover, the finch is the coward, etc. Thus, they make different excuses, based on their types, for not going on the journey, and when they do go, they pose distinct concerns and questions. The hoopoe, the wisest of the birds, who lead them and answers their questions and objections represents a social or religious leader who guides a group toward a utopian world of peace and freedom. To demonstrate the hoopoe and the other birds, various themes are presented throughout this work, some performed only once while others are repeated in several movements, either in the original form or as a motivic variation.

Movement I, Quest, presents a variety of themes that represent the numerous questions asked by the birds at the beginning of the journey. The timbral and textural capacities of the orchestra are featured extensively, beginning the work dramatically and setting the stage for the rest of the movements.

---

Movement II, Love, is based on a lyrical theme first presented in oboe. This theme is developed using different instruments throughout the movement, accompanied by contrasting themes and figures such as the theme first presented in piccolo. In my opinion, love consists of contrasting emotions such as happiness and sadness, patience and restlessness, and excitement and disappointment. Thus, the composer has tried to create deeply emotional but contrasting moments in this movement through a wide array of musical elements, including but not limited to timbral diversity, alteration of solo and tutti, and integration of short and sustained figures. *Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia* from Aram Khachaturian’s ballet *Spartacus* was a source of inspiration for developing this deeply emotional movement.

Movement III, Mystery, uncovers the mystifying world of the unknown through the progression of various themes and textures. To convey mystery, the movement avoids conventionality as much as possible, using the compositional tools of fugal passages and hexatonic collections to evoke the feeling. The movement begins with a fugal motive that recurs several times over the course of the movement. The hexatonic collections of HEX\(_{0,1}\), HEX\(_{2,3}\), and HEX\(_{3,4}\) (starting at measures 1, 21, and 33, respectively) are also used to create bizarre tones and atmospheres. Furthermore, the octatonic and chromatic collections are occasionally used to add color to the main content. The movement features motivic variation and numerous local climaxes that resolve in a big climax at the end.

Movement IV, Detachment and Serenity, features an expressive theme in solo passages accompanied by the orchestra. The goal is to stimulate the human’s detachment from the external world, which leads to inner serenity. The climax represents the constant strife against distractions required to achieve eternal satisfaction.
Movement V, Unity, is based on the thematic and rhythmic patterns presented in the previous movements, particularly movements I–III, and reviews and repeats that content. The movement exhibits the potential of the orchestra to unify and create a rich yet delicate texture, acting as a bridge to connect the prior and subsequent movements.

Movement VI, Awe, signifies a journey to the world of perplexity based on the octatonic collections. It abounds with contrapuntal figures that suggest wonderment and “a deep bewilderment unknown before”, as described in the prologue.

Movement VII, Poverty and Nothingness, is a cadenza that evokes a deeply spiritual character through prolonged low notes, long suspension of a lyrical theme, and minimal manipulation of musical elements. Like the cadenzas of the classic and romantic eras, this cadenza is a long stretch of music, unlike the rest of the work, that concludes with the full orchestra returning. Although it explores various possibilities of time and texture, showcasing distinctive tones and timbres, it is not the soloistic/virtuosic climax of the whole work as opposed to the cadenzas of the past. Instead, it is the musical manifestation of a state of mind described as “suspended” and “motionless” in the prologue. The beginning of Bela Batok’s The Wooden Prince, Op. 13, was a source of inspiration for composing this movement.

Although each movement presents unique programmatic and musical characteristics, they are united by certain shared musical themes and elements to tie the piece together as a whole. To successfully present the piece as a symphonic poem, the composer has also attempted to reflect the perspectives of the original literary work in each movement as much as possible.
Another bird said: 'Hoopoe, you can find
The way from here, but we are almost blind –
The path seems full of terrors and despair.
Dear hoopoe, how much further till we're there?'

'Before we reach our goal,' the hoopoe said,
The journey's seven valleys lie ahead;
How far this is the world has never learned,
For no one who has gone there has returned –
Impatient bird, who would retrace this trail?
There is no messenger to tell the tale,
And they are lost to our concerns below –
How can men tell you what they do not know?
The first stage is the valley of the Quest;
Then Love's wide valley is our second test;
The third is insight into Mystery,
The fourth Detachment and Serenity –
The fifth is Unity; the sixth is Awe,
A deep bewilderment unknown before,
The seventh Poverty and Nothingness –
And there you are suspended, motionless,
Till you are drawn – the impulse is not yours –
A drop absorbed in seas that have no shores.\(^4\)

**Instrumentation**

Flute 1
Flute 2 (doubles Piccolo)
Oboe 1
Oboe 2 (doubles English Horn)
Clarinet in Bb 1
Clarinet in Bb 2 (doubles Bass Clarinet in Bb)
Bassoon 1
Bassoon 2 (doubles Contrabassoon)

4 Horns in F
2 Trumpets in C
2 Tenor Trombones
Bass Trombone and Tuba

Timpani (32, 29, 26, 23 inches)
Percussion 1 (Bass Drum, Large Gong, Suspended Cymbal, Castanets, Chimes)

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\[\text{Bass Drum} \quad \text{Large Gong} \quad \text{Suspended Cymbal} \quad \text{Castanets}\]
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Percussion 2 (Medium Gong, Crash Cymbals, Vibraphone, Glockenspiel)

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\[\text{Medium Gong} \quad \text{Crash Cymbals}\]
```

Harp

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Double Bass (low C string/C extension)
III. Mystery

Fl. 1

Fl. 2 (Picc.)

Ob. 1

Ob. 2 (Eng. Hn.)

Cl. 1

Cl. 2 (B. Cl.)

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2 (Cb.)

Hn. 1, 3

Hn. 2, 4

CTpt. 1, 2

Tbn. 1, 2

B. Tbn. Tuba

Timp.

Perc.

to Suspended Cymbal

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
IV. Detachment and Serenity
V. Unity
VI. Awe
VII. Poverty and Nothingness
PART II: A STUDY OF MUSIC COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY
CHAPTER 3. INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

Music composition pedagogy is a complex field with limited resources and research that seems to defy codification. Since the early stages of musical development, many composers have offered their perspectives on how to teach music composition. However, these views have not been concisely collected into a single framework to facilitate further research. This chapter provides a conceptual and historical investigation of music composition pedagogy and a brief overview of the perspectives and practices of three successful composition pedagogues: Bach, Schoenberg, and Boulanger.

Although one controversial view holds that music composition cannot or should not be taught, others have argued that establishing a standard of excellence in composition would not be possible without the preservation and transmission of compositional methods and techniques. Perhaps the craft of music composition would have fallen into decline if no composer had taught pupils. Joseph Kerman believed that the “teacher of composition, like the composer himself, is constantly dealing with questions of good and bad, good and better.” Donald Harris has said that “questions about the teaching of composition are serious ones, and even after considerable thought they may remain confused.” Thus, it is important to learn, develop, and practice the most effective methods and perspectives in music composition pedagogy.


Music composition is a creative discipline. Reginald Smith Brindle, in his book *Musical Composition*, says the following:

Composition is both an intellectual discipline and a creative stimulus. Chess is an excellent intellectual discipline, but only stretches the mind. Composition, whether it stretches the mind or not, takes us on that crucial journey into our own imagination which is one of man’s greatest experiences. To think is at least something, but to think creatively is to live a satisfying and absorbing intellectual life, one which can be enjoyed by only a chosen few.\(^9\)

Since music composition is a creative discipline, it is one of the most challenging disciplines to teach. Research has found that that teachers’ perceptions can directly affect pedagogy in the creative disciplines.\(^10\) Therefore, it is important that the composition teacher consider every student as an individual with a distinctive mindset and understand that the creative process varies for each student, as it differs for the teacher.

There are many examples showing that students learn the composition process by imitating their teachers: Mozart and his father, Stravinsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, and Beethoven and Haydn, to name a few.\(^11\) Thus, it is necessary that composition teachers successfully play their role as models and make sure that imitation does not affect the student’s own creativity. It is also essential that composition teachers apply the set of compositional tools and techniques that have been created and used by great composers over the centuries, instead of selecting tools and


techniques that they themselves have used and developed to align with their own styles and interests.

Not all composers are interested in serving as pedagogues. One reason is that it is difficult to pass on to students the art of music composition, which is a highly instinctive and experimental art. Although almost all great composers have received composition training to some degree, the gift of composition craftsmanship is something that they have earned only through many years of study and practice. The transfer of this craftsmanship to a pupil is challenging. Another reason is that some composers consider teaching to be an obstacle to their own creative activities.\(^\text{12}\) Being an active composer is a full-time job that requires complete dedication; therefore, many composers decide not to carry teaching responsibilities, devoting their time to composition alone.

Although many composers over the history of music have contributed to its pedagogy, three composers have been particularly successful in training students and establishing significant pedagogical developments: Johann Sebastian Bach, Arnold Schoenberg, and Nadia Boulanger. The pedagogy of music composition in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century—and a representative composer/pedagogue—was not been examined in this study, as the literature was limited on the pedagogical practices and perspectives for this era. The following sections highlight the composition methodologies of Bach, Schoenberg, and Boulanger, concisely examining their perspectives.

\(^{12}\) Hindemith, \textit{The Craft of Musical Composition}, 3.
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach was a German composer and pedagogue with an outstanding record of training pupils. Bach's sons, particularly his two eldest, Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emmanuel, were his most distinguished pupils. This distinction was not because they received superior instruction, but because they were exposed to good music at home from an early age.¹³

According to *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, although Bach had taught numerous pupils since c. 1706/7 (most notably J. C. Vogler and J. T. Krebs), it was only in 1720, with the composition of *Clavierbüchlein* (dedicated to his eldest son Wilhelm Friedemann [W. F. Bach]), that the element of instruction entered into his compositions. Subsequently, he composed works specifically for instruction. The musical education of W. F. Bach was similar to J. S. Bach’s own early musical experiences in three ways. First, composition and performance were united through the medium of keyboard. Second, both learned composition by copying out the works of established composers. Third, both of their earliest composition experiences had roots in keyboard composition.¹⁴ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (C. P. E. Bach) described his father’s composition pedagogy as follows:

> In composition he started his pupils right in with what was practical, and omitted all the dry species of counterpoint that are given in Fux and others. His pupils had to begin their studies by learning pure four-part thorough bass. From this he went to chorales; first he added the basses to them himself, and they had to invent the alto and tenor. Then he taught them to devise the basses themselves. He particularly insisted on the writing out the thorough bass [in four] real parts. In teaching figures, he began with two-part ones and so on . . . As for the invention

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of ideas, he required this from the very beginning, anyone who had none he advised to stay away from composition altogether. With his children as well as other pupils he did not begin the study of composition until he had seen works of theirs in which he detected talent.\textsuperscript{15}

Johann Nikolaus Forkel, the German musicologist who wrote the first biography of Bach in 1802, examined Bach’s pedagogic activities and perspectives in a chapter entitled “Bach as a Teacher” in his book \textit{Johann Sebastian Bach: His Life, Art, and Work}. Forkel maintains that “there is, in fact, only one way to become a good teacher, and that is to have gone through the discipline of self-instruction, a path along which the beginner may go astray a thousand times before attaining to perfection.” He then continues as follows, stating that J. S. Bach developed his superb pedagogical skills through the gradual practices of self-discipline:

\begin{quote}
To teach well a man needs to have a full mind. He must have discovered how to meet and have overcome the obstacles in his own path before he can be successful in teaching others how to avoid them. Bach united both qualities. Hence, as a teacher he was the most instructive, clear, and definite that has ever been. In every branch of his art he produced a band of pupils who followed in his footsteps, without, however, equaling his achievement.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Forkel mentions that Bach’s composition methodology started with elementary studies of harmony and counterpoint. Apparently, he insisted that his students not rely on the piano but compose without it, referring to those who did otherwise as “Harpsichord Knights.” Forkel also states that Bach required his composition pupils to “work out their musical ideas mentally.” If he thought that any of his students, even his sons, lacked the proper mental preparation to compose,

\textsuperscript{15} Butt, \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Bach}, 198.

\textsuperscript{16} Forkel, \textit{Johann Sebastian Bach}, 93.
he encouraged them to temporarily stay away from composition and look for ideas to develop in their musical minds.  

According to Forkel, an interesting aspect of Bach’s teaching method was to allow his pupils significant liberty to experiment with musical elements such as melody and harmony, while earlier composition teachers such as Angelo Berardi (c. 1636–1694), Giovanni Bononcini (1670–1747), and Johann Joseph Fux (c. 1660–1741) did not allow such freedom. This approach clearly shows Bach’s view of teaching music composition as a creative discipline, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951)

The Austrian composer and pedagogue Arnold Schoenberg is considered one of the most influential figures of 20th-century music. He taught many students, including Hanns Eisler, Roberto Gerhard, Lou Harrison, Dika Newlin, and John Cage, in private lessons and at institutions such as the Prussian Academy of the Arts, the University of Southern California, and the University of California. Among his earliest students in Vienna prior to World War I were Anton Webern and Alban Berg, both of whom now represent, together with the master, the “Second Viennese School.” Schoenberg significantly contributed to the field of music composition pedagogy through instructive textbooks, essays, lectures, interviews, and private

17 Forkel, Johann Sebastian Bach, 96–97.

18 Forkel, Johann Sebastian Bach, 98–99.


According to Walter Frisch, studying music with Schoenberg was fascinating because he put so much energy and enthusiasm into every word. His lectures and reviews of students’ works were fluid and developing because he did not say what he knew but rather what he thought, and his thoughts were always new and fresh. His student Karl Linke related Schoenberg’s teaching methodology to the pedagogic perspective that finds it necessary to “purge teaching of rigid formulae.” In a 1948 essay entitled “The Blessing of the Dressing” in his book *Style and Idea*, Schoenberg said,

> As a teacher I never taught only what I knew, but rather what the pupil needed. Thus I have never taught a student "a style," that is, the technical peculiarities of a specific composer, degraded to tricks, which to the master in question might have been the solution of a torturing problem. And if I say in the preface to my *Harmonielehre* that I tried to invent something for every student to serve his personal necessities, that does not mean that I made it easier for one of them.

He then elaborated,

> All my pupils differ from one another extremely and though perhaps the majority compose twelve-tone music, one could not speak of a school. They all had to find their way alone, for themselves. And that is exactly what they did; everyone has his own manner of obeying rules derived from the treatment of twelve tones.

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In the same essay, he makes the point that the teacher’s perspective as a composer does not necessarily agree with his/her teaching methodology and that a successful teaching curriculum must consider knowledge as a pathway to broader horizons:

For many years I had tried in vain to teach my pupils some discoveries I had made in the field of multiple counterpoint. I worked hard to formulate this advice in a manner conceivable for a pupil, but I did not succeed. Only once, in one of the best classes I ever had, I considered the presentation of this problem and its solution as final, and I asked the class to compose for the next lesson something applying the methods emerging from my solution. It was one of my greatest disappointments. Only one of my students had tried to use my advice, and he had misunderstood me as much as the rest of the class. This experience taught me a lesson: secret science is not what an alchemist would have refused to teach you; it is a science which cannot be taught at all. It is inborn or it is not there.

Schoenberg recognized students’ problems and showed them how similar problems had been solved in the music of great masters.\textsuperscript{25} His student Karl Horwitz said, “I already knew the classics before I came to him; through him I lived them. I learned to see so much of what before had lain veiled in front of my eyes.” He also mentioned that Schoenberg wrote in his copy of String Quartet No. 1 (D Minor, Op. 7), “Don’t strive to learn anything from this; rather try to learn from Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms! Then perhaps some things here will seem worthy of note to you.”\textsuperscript{26}

Schoenberg’s method of teaching composition was entirely based on his approach to composition as a creative discipline. According to his student Erwin Stein, “Schoenberg teaches you how to think. He guides the pupil toward seeing with his own eyes, as if he were the very first one to observe the phenomena. What has been thought of before should not be the norm. Even if our thoughts are no better than someone else's—it is not a matter of finding the absolute

\textsuperscript{25} Frisch, Schoenberg and His World, 252.

\textsuperscript{26} Frisch, \textit{Schoenberg and His World}, 256.
truth but rather a question of the search for the truth.” Another student, Paul Koniger, said that “Everything that he gives comes from his depths, affects the innermost essence, and allows it to grow, like a tree grows out of inner necessity.” Last but not the least, his student Karl Linke described Schoenberg’s teaching method as the utmost pedagogical model in music: “Real learning would not be placing things next to each other, but things flowing in and out of each other, the capability of change and the capability of bringing new things to light. Learning is not addition, but multiplication. Learning multiplication with Schoenberg is far more than one usually expects from the study of music.”

**Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979)**

Nadia Boulanger was a French composer, conductor, pianist, and teacher, notable for teaching a great number of the leading composers and musicians of the 20th century, including the American composers Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, and Philip Glass. Boulanger taught aural skills, harmony, counterpoint, piano/organ, and composition for almost seven decades. She taught both private and group lessons in France, the U.S., and England at institutions such as Ecole Normale de Musique, Paris Conservatoire, Conservatoire Américain, the Juilliard School, the Yehudi Menuhin School, and the Royal College of Music.

In contrast to Schoenberg, Boulanger did not collect her teaching materials and perspectives into textbooks or essays to make them available to a wider public and refused publishers’ suggestions to do so. According to Caroline Potter, the real reason for Boulanger’s

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27 Frisch, *Schoenberg and His World*, 250.

28 According to Potter, one of the few sources to reveal information about Boulanger’s teaching of nonexpert musicians is a small archive of teaching material that has been preserved in the Nadia Boulanger Collection at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Lyon.
reluctance was “her feeling that personal contact between teacher and student was just as essential as the transmission of cultural information and values; we have seen that her concern for her students went far beyond musical matters.” Potter also says that Boulanger’s relationship with her students was beyond the boundaries of the classroom and that she was interested in developing her students “as people, as well as musicians.”

Boulanger strongly believed that the study of composition is the study of masterpieces and that students should be exposed to a wide variety of musical styles, choosing to use one or more in their own creative work. Her teaching materials were full of references to works of the great composers, including but not limited to Ravel, Debussy, Fauré, Stravinsky, and Satie, and to the early music of Monteverdi and Machaut. English composer and Boulanger’s student Lennox Berkeley said that Boulanger “helped us to form our own tastes by insisting that we had to know music by composers of the past in depth.”

Boulanger had a very comprehensive composition curriculum, starting with technical studies of harmony, counterpoint, etc., and then composition, which resulted in her students’ high levels of musicianship. Boulanger’s student David Ward-Steinman said that when he had no sufficient composition material to show her in a lesson, she would “ask me to do such things as sight-read (for example, the Copland Piano Sonata), reduce orchestra scores at the piano, or play


renaissance choral music in four to six different clefs at the piano. When I could do some of that satisfactorily she would then ask me to transpose it to a different key.” Ward-Steinman described the details of his experience as follows:

On one occasion she asked me if I knew “every note of Don Giovanni by heart,” and I had to confess that I did not. Whereupon she went to her library and brought back an Urtext edition of the complete opera score and asked me to reduce one of the arias at the piano. I began, and successfully traversed the first few pages when she stopped me and noted that the inner viola part, which I had been playing with my thumbs, was “not legato enough.” So we made an exercise of the viola part, alternating thumbs with every other note throughout the entire aria until it was “legato enough.” Recomencing at the top, I achieved a few more pages with the viola part now very smooth under my thumbs, entendu, until she stopped me again because I had slurred or smeared a scale passage in the double-basses. The execution was “not clean enough” and the bass part then had to be practiced separately. Once again we started at the top, and I had made it almost to the end without missing any notes or transpositions when she stopped me once more and asked why I hadn’t played the high flute part in the last few bars. I replied, “mademoiselle, I can’t reach it, I was too busy with the lower parts.” Her response, delivered in stentorian tones: “But if you had transposed the part down an octave then you could have played it with your little finger.” Well, yes . . . now why didn’t I think of that on the spur of the moment? So once again we began, and this time I made it all the way to the end, in tempo, no wrong notes, legato viola part, clean bass lines, flute part now covered albeit an octave lower; what more could she possibly expect? “Da-veed, if you play it again do you suppose you could also sing the vocal part?” Astonished, I replied “Absolutely not, mademoiselle!” and stalked out of her studio, slamming the door behind me in exasperation. Mon Dieu, what does this woman expect! She’s impossible! 

He then continues that “It was quite a while before I understood the meta-lesson I should have learned, which was that there is really no point at which we should stop growing and declare ourselves satisfied with whatever level of ability we have attained, or think what we can

33 According to Ward-Steinman, Mademoiselle is the courtesy title Boulanger preferred.

do now is the best we are capable of doing. There is always more to learn, more skill to acquire, more territory to conquer.”

Boulanger believed that both private and group lessons are necessary:

Having a group class is important in more than one respect. Not to see pupils separately is a fatal error, but on the other hand, to give them the sense of thinking or arguing in a group, of knowing what others think, is humanly, if not musically, very necessary. To meet people often, to exchange ideas, to communicate without loss of individuality.35

Regarding her approach to composition as a creative art and the teacher’s responsibility to evoke it, Boulanger said,

[A composition teacher should] develop in a pupil the faculties which will allow him to manipulate the tools of his trade. The teacher has no control over what he will do with this tool. I can’t give someone the capacity to invent, no more than I can take that capacity from them; I can, however, give him the freedom – that’s the right word – to read, to listen, to see, and to understand.36

In a 1936 interview in the Radio Times, D. F. Aitken said that Boulanger’s students admired their teacher as the best teacher of Europe because they believed that “since she is not primarily a composer, she has no style of her own to impress on her pupils, no ready-made pattern by which to turn out so many little Boulangers with five years’ struggle in front of them before they can recover any semblance of individuality.”37

Boulanger’s pedagogy extended beyond the doors of her studio and included continual correspondence with her former students in many forms, including letters and advocacy for the

35 Monsaingeon and Boulanger, Mademoiselle, 26.


37 Potter, “Nadia Boulanger (1887–979),” 156.; According to Potter, although Boulanger was open to diverse styles, her own style was inclined to neo-classism from 1930s onwards and she refused to teach students interested in serial composition, musique concrete, or electronic music
performance and publication of their works. One example is the commission of a new work, *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*, from her student Aaron Copland to be premiered by her on organ with the New York Symphony Orchestra.⁴⁸

Both Schoenberg and Boulanger paid great tribute to Bach and used his music as a reference in their teaching. The clearest evidence of this usage is found in Schoenberg’s late instructive textbook *Preliminary Exercises in Counterpoint*, which presents contrapuntal exercises in major and minor modes:

> And . . . there is no greater perfection in music than in Bach! Not Beethoven or Haydn, not even Mozart who was closest to it, ever attained such perfection. But it seems that this perfection does not result in a style which a student can imitate. This perfection is one of idea, of basic conception, not one of elaboration. The latter is only the natural consequence of the profundity of the idea, and this cannot be imitated, nor can it be taught.⁴⁹

The music of J. S. Bach was also the center of Boulanger’s classes in history and analysis. In admiration of Bach’s musical heritage, she said,

> I believe that a musician should know the two books of “The Well-Tempered Clavier” and, if possible, some cantatas, in depth. I try to give this daily bread to my pupils at all cost. It would seem odd to me if someone had never read the Bible.⁵⁰

The pedagogical approaches of Bach, Schoenberg, Boulanger, and other teachers not mentioned in this study have been followed by pedagogues around the world. One example is Helen L. Gunderson, Professor Emerita and Founder of the Festival of Contemporary Music at Louisiana State University, who taught a great number of students. According to David Penri-

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⁴⁸ Johnson, *Training the Composer*, 97.


Evans, “she has been referred to as the American Boulanger as at the time she was teaching composition there were few other women doing so.” The pedagogy of music composition has continued to improve and has been updated considerably due to developments in communication and technology. Therefore, it is necessary to stay informed regarding the most recent progress in the pedagogy of music composition. The following chapter surveys the pedagogical views of a selection of composers currently holding professorship positions in accredited universities in the U.S.

CHAPTER 4. A SURVEY OF METHODOLOGY AND CURRICULUM OF A SELECTION OF MUSIC/MUSIC COMPOSITION PROFESSORS

Introduction

This chapter examines the methodology and curriculum of a selection of music/music composition professors at accredited universities in the U.S. I asked each professor to answer a set of fifteen questions concerning various aspects of music composition pedagogy. The questions elicit the perspectives of both music composition and music education professors, integrating them into one comprehensive approach. Although each question focuses on a specific objective, the questions incorporate a broad outlook and serve as a platform for further discussion. The questions are listed below:

1. What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?

2. What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?

3. What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?

4. How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?

5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?

7. What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?

8. How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?

9. How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?

10. What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?

11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?
12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’ productivity?

13. What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?

14. What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?

15. What are some highlights of your composition methodology?

The professors who generously shared their experience and expertise by answering these questions are, in alphabetical order: Dr. Stephen David Beck (Louisiana State University), Dr. Dinos Constantinides (Louisiana State University), Dr. Don Freund (Indiana University), Dr. Mara Gibson (Louisiana State University), Dr. Edward Jacobs (East Carolina University), Dr. James Mobberley (University of Missouri – Kansas City), Dr. Jeffrey Perry (Louisiana State University), and Dr. Paul Rudy (University of Missouri – Kansas City). The professors at Louisiana State University, my institution, answered the questions in interviews and their answers were transcribed. The professors at the other universities responded to the questions in writing and emailed their answers. For each professor, the answers are preceded by short bibliographical information providing a concise overview of his/her musical career. The biography footnotes include links to online resources to further learn about the music and research of the professors.

I would like to take the opportunity to again express my appreciation for the generosity and support of all of the professors who agreed to collaborate on this study. Their answers have helped me broaden my horizons considerably and will undoubtedly be invaluable resources for future research.
Dr. Stephen David Beck

Biography

Stephen David Beck is the Haymon Professor of Composition and Computer Music at Louisiana State University. He holds a joint appointment at the Center for Computation & Technology, where he previously served as the Area Head for the Cultural Computing focus area and Director of the AVATAR Initiative in Digital Media. He was also Interim Director of the center from 2008-2010.

Dr. Beck received his Ph.D. in music composition and theory from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1988, and held a Fulbright Fellowship in 1985-86 where he was a researcher at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris, France. His current research includes sound diffusion systems, high-performance computing applications in music, and virtual music instruments, a system of interactive computer programs that extend and expand on the performance capabilities of acoustic instruments.

His music has been performed throughout the world, including performances at Weill Recital Hall, Sao Paolo Bienal ’91, SCREAM Radio Series, Concert Band Directors National Association Biennial, North American Saxophone Alliance, New Music America, World Harp Congress, and on the Triforium Series in Los Angeles. His music and writings have been published by G. Shirmer, MIT Press, and the Computer Music Journal, and his music has been recorded on the SEAMUS, EMF and Gothic record labels.

Dr. Beck has also presented lectures and papers on his research in interactive computer music and high-performance computing applications in the arts at recent meetings of the International Computer Music Conference, the Global Grid Forum, the Teaching in Higher Education (THE) Forum, the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States
(SEAMUS), and the Society of Composers, Inc. He currently serves as Music Coordinator and Regional Director (Americas) of the International Computer Music Association. He also served on the board of officers of SEAMUS, most recently as President (1996-2000).42

Questions and Answers

1. What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?

STEPHEN DAVID BECK: That's a pretty fundamental question. When a student hasn't really had a lot of experience in composing, I like to look at examples of other works and have students try to pick apart how the pieces are put together and have them model a piece based on that kind of structure to see if they would be able to do it. We do that a couple of times and then as students get more competent, we go away from modeling after a particular piece but then saying “okay, build your own model of how you want to compose something” and then follow that. So, it's very much have rooted in analysis, an initial analysis, and then modeling and internal synthesis. That, I think, gets them to a piece that will represent their musical language or their musical vocabulary without imposing anything of mine because one of the things that I try to be very careful about is to not impose my own aesthetics on what they're doing and try to reach to where their aesthetics are and help them with those sorts of issues and help them come to their own conclusions.

2. What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?

BECK: I really want to hear from the student as to why they have to do this, why are they there, what brings them to my office other than “Well, I'm in school and you're my assigned teacher.” I

42 Visit the following websites for more information: https://www.lsu.edu/cmda/music/people/faculty/beck.php; https://sdbeck.blog/.
need to know what is driving them as a musician, who are they, what's their instrument, what
music do they listen to, what music don't they listen to, why are they in the class in the first
place, what do they want to be when they grow up so to speak because all those things are really
important. If a student comes to my door in the first class and tells me he/she plays violin in the
high school orchestra, has been playing an instrument since five or six years old, has done
recitals, or is very active in music and has an appreciation for the classical realm, I would treat
that student very differently. I would approach that student very differently with different kinds
of goals and objectives than a student who comes in and says I play guitar, I write songs, I'm in a
band, I'm a DJ, or I'm mixing music at a club or with friends and I want to learn more about it. I
would take each of those students and work with them in a different way because I want to work
with them in their space and bring them from their space into spaces that they're unfamiliar with
and maybe even uncomfortable with so that they can see that how they can take what their music
is and add more depth to it and make it even better.

3. What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony,
counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?

BECK: Obviously, you need to look at all those things. I think that as you're evaluating your
students and how they're progressing, you can give them exercises or compositional approaches
or compositional worksheets, if you will, on writing melodies, thinking about harmony and how
harmony might work, and counterpoint exercises. For example, if I'm working with a student and
we're working on let’s say a string quartet, I would have them work on monophonic writing or
homophonic writing to give them some ideas on how to work with melody and harmony. Then I
would ask them “okay, here's one section that you've made. That's very homophonic. Here's
another section. Make it imitative” and that forces them to think about counterpoint and all the
different kinds of contrapuntal issues that they work on. I might ask them to explore some
extended techniques on their instruments to explore different kinds of timbres. The extended
techniques don't even have to be that hard, pizzicato for example. It's a lot of people who just
don't think about it, especially young composers don't necessarily think about all the different
ways a string instrument can be excited and made to articulate sound. Sometimes, there are
exercises that you could do like creating a look at Webern’s *Klangfarbenmelodie* approach
where you're really holding all these three things together and thinking about all those
characteristics as you're writing. For rhythm, sometimes I've given exercises where students are
to create a piece just out of rhythms, not necessarily for percussion but really just thinking about
how to rhythmically put things together. Some of the techniques of past, even Renaissance
motets, have ways of dealing with rhythms and melodies that are independent of one another and
line up together. Those kinds of things can really capture students’ imagination and keep them up
very late at night being frustrated but still getting some really good concepts about how to create
rhythm not only within the articulations of sounds but in the rhythms of harmony, rhythms of
rhythm, rhythms of tempo, rhythms of speech, and rhythms of song. All these things have a
temporal map to them so if we apply concepts of rhythm to those other parameter spaces, that
gives them just a higher level of concept to their pieces. The other compositional concept would
be discontinuities, trying to get them to think about multiple streams that are simultaneous or
discontinuous. An exercise might be to take two musical ideas and splice them together like they
were taped rather than transformed from one to the other or transitioned from one to the other –
thinking of different ways of organizing your material. Then applying some of these concepts on
a general level rather than on a specific level. So, the example of rhythm being applied to

43 *Klangfarbenmelodie* is a compositional technique which refers to the succession of
tone-colors analogous/equivalent to the melodic succession.
harmonic rhythm, to tempo rhythm, to the rhythm of how melody is evaluated. So, those sorts of things could be very effective.

4. How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?

BECK: Well, obviously when I work with graduate students, I try to demand more of their time and a little more of their energy than I would for an undergraduate student. Again, it depends on the individual student. That said, I actually prefer to both teach group lessons and be in group lessons. When I was an undergrad, I really enjoyed the group lessons because not only would I learn from my own mistakes, we would review pieces all the time in our class. I’d get a little bit of time with the professor to look at my piece. We discussed strengths and weaknesses. Okay, good. But then a colleague of mine would get up and do the same thing and I would learn from what they were doing. What they were doing was completely different from what I was doing but I could still learn from whatever issues came up with his piece or her piece. So, by the end of the day, not only did I learn about what I was working on, I could learn from what everybody else was working on and even get inspired by some of those ideas. So, I personally think that group lessons are far more effective, especially at the undergraduate level. That's just my personal preference. When I teach electro-acoustic music, I much prefer to do that in a group setting for exactly the same reason. I think students at all levels are just intimidated by being in a group lesson. They’re willing to reveal only so much. But there does come a time when you want to have independent lessons with a faculty member. So, those you do take a little bit differently. You can do a deeper dive and really penetrate into the piece in a very specific moment-by-moment way that you can't do in a group lesson—a level of communication that you develop with the students that can be very personal. I think that it helps the composer find a more personal voice and it's easier to help students with their personal voices in that context than in a
group context. You get into a private lesson and then you can really have good conversations with students and try to dig deeply into what they're working on and what their interests are.

5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

**BECK:** I do both. Especially with new students or students who are not strongly self-motivated, I will give them some starting parameters; one instrument, four instruments, it has to be three minutes long, it needs to be in three sections, it can only be in one section, it's a piece for piano but you never play any of the notes—you have to play on the strings inside the piano. I mean things like that. I set up the initial parameters for the students to get them started or get them pointed in a direction that will force them to be creative. One of my personal influences is a statement by Stravinsky from *Poetics of Music*\(^{44}\) where he says that the more limits that I have (the more things that I limit myself to do), the more creative I become. I think the biggest challenge for any student, for any composer for that matter, is really the syndrome of the blank page, the terror of the blank page, where you start. So, sometimes I'll give them some parameters to start with. I would normally not give students a melody to work from or a harmony to work from or a rhythmic pattern unless there was a specific goal that I had. I've done this before where I tell a student that they can start with any three notes they want but they're limited to only those three notes and then they have another three notes that are the target and they have to do a transition from the first set of three notes to the second set of three notes. I don't care how they do it, I don't tell them how to do it, but that's the idea of giving them some material to get started.

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\(^{44}\) *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons* is a book by Stravinsky originally published in 1942.
with. Beyond that, it really is to try to create the boundary conditions for a composer to start with, to get them pass that blank page. Sometimes I'll work with students to help them come up with their own solutions to the blank page. So, we'll say “okay, we're gonna work on a quartet. what kind of quartet do you want to write for? – *String quartet*. Okay, but you just wrote for strings. you wrote a little string orchestra piece. Why don't we do a saxophone quartet? That's a little different. – *Oh, okay, great*. Do you have any sense of the scope? – *Well, maybe three to five minutes*. Okay, that makes sense. How about the musical language? (and they might say) – *well, I have this melody already set to go*. Okay, great. Write three melodies and then use all three.” I might give them a requirement that in the piece, you should have both homophonic writing and contrapuntal writing. But usually I reserve that for undergrads or students who have not had a lot of prior experience. I find that once students get into this rhythm, they're able to do those kinds of pre-compositional strategies on their own and they don't necessarily need my assistance unless I have a specific objective that I want them to work with.

6. **What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?**

**BECK:** There's just so many. I try to draw on things that have a universal appeal but also have some kind of application to the music that they're working on. So, it's entirely contextual. If I have a student who has been writing classical music/orchestral music, in a concert music vein, then I could reach back as far as Mozart and Beethoven for structure and general architectures and Debussy, Ravel and Berlioz for orchestration. I would also try to look at where they are in their own mental space and try to find composers whose work would be responsive to what they're interested in doing. If the students are interested in doing algorithmic composition, then I would point them in a direction that would give them resources there. If they're interested in doing environmental music, then I would point them towards other works by other composers.
Just so that they have an understanding of what the language is within each of those areas and give them space to then again analysis practice, modeling, and synthesis of their own ideas.

[Are there specific compositions or works?]

**BECK:** There aren't necessarily any specific works. It just depends on what's there and what I've been listening to lately. I find that Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7* is very helpful. I keep finding new things every time I listen to it. So, I try to convey that idea to students. I look at *La Mer* often to talk especially about orchestration. Stravinsky with orchestration techniques—uber instrument techniques—that he uses that are just remarkable. It'll just be whatever is close at hand. I want to make sure that that I have a recording handy so that they cannot just see but hear what we're doing.

7. What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?

**BECK:** Well, I always find that starting with smaller groups is easier than starting with larger groups. It just again depends on the skill level. I do find that students often find it very challenging to write for a single voice by itself and in doing that, I like to put students outside of their comfort zone. I like to make sure that they're writing for an instrument that is not their primary instrument so that they're forced to think about the music and the instrument from a more theoretical perspective rather than “oh, this is what I played last night in my dorm room.” If they're saxophonists, they might have been practicing a jazz song, well, let's put that aside away and write for oboe, violin, piano, or something like that. So, I really do try to shape that for the individual student and then slowly and incrementally add more instruments to the realm. One of the advantages with a single voice is that you don't have to worry about counterpoint but then
again you do, and you don't have to worry about harmony but then again you do, and so it gives you kind of a place to start with that—all the students will have to ultimately deal with it.

It also depends on what students are really interested in and what they're looking for. Students need experiences writing for all different kinds of instruments. So, if they've been writing a string quartet the first semester or first quarter, then I might give them a wind quintet or a piano chamber group to work on. They should have a lot of different kinds of writing experiences so that they have some fluency in all the instruments—the idiomatic style for each instrument—and how to make those things work. So, again, it’s all contextual. It all depends on where the student is. Smaller to larger is a general rule of thumb. In large part, you start getting into orchestral scale pieces that are harder for students to really hear—they're harder to get performed because they cost more. So, I like starting small and getting larger.

8. **How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?**

**BECK:** It depends on what I'm doing. If I'm working with students on a one-on-one basis, I try to make sure that I cover a couple of things at each lesson. I want to hear what they've written, what they have done from the previous lesson, and how it has been improved, changed, gotten worse/better, and how has that been addressed. I work with the students to evaluate that and get them to see where they could make changes or get them to just think about what they're doing. Then, I like to reserve time to listen and look at music and try to find pieces that are relevant to what the student is working on. It is sometimes a challenge. That's why I keep my CD library, almost my entire CV library, on my computer so I can pull up almost anything. It's just remembering everything that's in there because I've got a lot. So, it's just a matter of trying to manage time. If I'm working with a class of students, then I try to make sure to keep on a fixed schedule. It's a much more structured kind of activity. When I'm teaching electro-acoustic music,
of course part of that time is addressing code issues. Other parts are talking about what they’re trying to do musically, listening, and sometimes going out into the field and doing field recordings or site recordings of some sorts. So, sometimes that happens outside of the normal lesson time. So, it just depends.

9. How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition lesson session (or in a composition course, in general)?

BECK: I try to make sure that there's some listening. Formal analysis, I think, is something that I would start if I'm trying to introduce a student to a new approach or a new set of ideas that are exemplified by a particular piece or a couple of pieces. If, for example, I've got advanced students and I want to introduce them to the Polish school, or what we used to call the Polish school (sound mass\textsuperscript{45} music), I would give them two or three pieces. I would start with one, we would listen to it, and I would do an analysis of it. Then I'd give them a couple of pieces to do an analysis to come back the next week and we talk about it. So, again it just depends on where we are in the curriculum.

10. What are your criteria in evaluating a student's work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?

BECK: I look at a couple of things. One is progress: how do the students engage? how much progress have they made? If I’m listening, can I tell the difference between music that they wrote at the beginning and the music that they wrote at the end? Have they improved? That for me is my primary criteria along with their general engagement and their showing up and having their homework ready to go. Those sorts of things. I don't grade on “this was the best piece of all my

\textsuperscript{45} Sound mass is the result of a compositional technique in which the importance of individual pitches is minimized in preference for texture, timbre, and dynamics.
students”. I don't do anything like that. I grade everything individually on how a student has progressed. If a student is not progressing, then either they've made a conscious decision that that's the level that they're going to finish out at or that they really don't want to be doing this anymore. So, I try to have good conversations with my students at that point. But generally speaking, I'm just I'm looking at their development.

11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?

**BECK:** One of the things that I really try to do is to get the students to critique themselves. It is probably the most important skill that a student can develop in any discipline but especially in composition. Because as a teacher as soon as they graduate, I'm gone, they're on their own. So, being able to critique their own work and make decisions about their own work is really fundamental. So, I almost never give direct feedback. A lot of times, it's “well, what do you think about this?” or “how do you think that this work?” Often, I do give direct feedback where I see either the student did not understand the nature of the homework assignment or if, for example, we're looking at counterpoint examples or rhythmic organizations and there are some things that work better than others. So, I almost never say “well, that's bad and that's good.” I might say “oh, I really like that” or “that's kind of problematic for me” but I'll always explain why and go through where the gradations are but I'm still relying on them to drive that conversation. If I see something that is kind of a challenge, I might say “I'm a little troubled by this. What are you doing in there? Why are you trying to get there?” and we might have a real discussion about why that's going. I might say “okay, you've made a good point. You can do that.” or I might say “well, you know the flute just doesn't play a low G and you can't do that.” So, there are some things that are just very mechanical like you can't write for instruments outside their range. But I
might ask “well, if you really need that note, why not change that instrument to alto flute or bass flute.” So, it gives us a point of conversation.

12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance the student’s productivity?

BECK: I try to provide feedback whenever we're meeting and whenever we're reviewing things. I don't know if I'm really enhancing student’s productivity. I think that's entirely self-generated. There's nothing I can really do to improve that unless their lack of productivity is because of a conceptual problem and I can help them work through those concepts. I think the blank paper, the terror of the blank paper, is one of those.

13. What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?

BECK: This is really hard because I really don't think I can teach students creativity. I really can't. That's something that's such a personal thing that I don't know that I can do it. What I can do is to give them the tools to be creative and I don't mean like “here’s C sound. You can just use that.” I mean the tools of what is counterpoint, what is harmony, how do these things work together, looking at examples of how people organize music whether we're talking about Beethoven or Jay-Z or Kendall Kendrick Lamar or Bobby McFerrin or Oscar Peterson. Everyone is creative in very different ways. If you don't have the skill set to enable creativity, you won't be able to be creative. People who are self-taught musicians create those environments on their own. They’re still doing that same process: developing tool sets and using them to be creative. So, I guess giving them those tools, giving them experiences in using those tools, and then letting them come upon those creative moments on their own, is really the only thing that I can do for them.
14. **What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?**

**BECK:** There are a couple of things. From my perspective as a teacher, I think the hardest part is making sure that I'm cultivating the student’s voice and not my own. I have a very unique voice and I like it being unique and I want students to find their own unique voices. So, my job is to help them find it making sure that I'm not making aesthetic judgments based on my own aesthetics but rather helping them make their own decisions about what's working and what's not working and why it's working or not working. That's really hard. It's a very easy line to trip over.

The other thing is trying to communicate to students the idea that the best, or the perfect, cannot be the enemy of the good. Just because something's not perfect, doesn't mean it's not ready to be discussed. If I get a call for someone that says I want to do a piece of yours with very few exceptions, I'll go back and say “well, I might want to change that. I really didn't like how that worked!” So, I'm constantly tweaking all of my pieces. That's just kind of the way I am. So, I think it is important to communicate to students that it's okay to go back and fix things or revise things or change them. That's a hard concept for students.

15. **What are some highlights of your composition methodology?**

**BECK:** I like playing at the edges of instruments. I like learning how to make instruments sound and then going beyond that. It doesn't matter whether it's a physical instrument or an electronic instrument. I like pushing things beyond the border although some musicians do not appreciate that. [laugh] For example, I wrote a saxophone concerto for Griffin Campbell [Distinguished Professor of Saxophone, Louisiana State University]. We were getting ready for it and talking through some ideas. I asked him “what are some techniques that you love doing that nobody seems to write for or could be better demonstrated?” and he gave me two ideas. One was slap tongues which are saxophone pizzicatos and the other was very fast tremolos. So, I used those
two ideas as the motivation for the entire concerto. All three movements were filled with that. In the first movement, in particular, I actually created counterpoint with the tremolos, so he was playing two lines at the same time through the tremolos—as you hear it, you wonder “wait, is that one voice or two voices?” That’s one example of pushing things to the limit. The other is for an electronic work, the piece I did with Edgar Berdahl [Assistant Professor of Experimental Music and Digital Media, Louisiana State University], *Quartet for Strings*. He built these fader boxes that had haptic controls that control the virtual instruments we created—string instruments. So, I was trying to look for some idiomatic things that could only be done in this virtual world and couldn't be done in a real world. So, we discovered two kinds of things: 1. One of the faders was connected to a virtual plectrum over a string, so as you moved to fader back and forth, you could feel the virtual plectrum cross the string and pluck the sound. It was kind of cool. If you pushed the plectrum just close enough to the string to get tension and then backed off a little bit, it would start to vibrate, and you could get this very subtle tremolo. 2. The other fader was the tension on the string, so as you pulled it towards you, it would increase the tension and raise the pitch of the string but would snap back if you let it go suddenly. The combination of the snap of the metal sound and the thud sound in the string would get these amazing low resonant tones. So, I really like finding those idiosyncratic performance methods that really push the instrument to the limit and plug away at that and I think that would be a characteristic of some of the music that I do.

I also like to inject humor every now and then, sometimes in a very overtly funny way and sometimes in a very subtle way. In my piece *The Wild Rumpus*, the second movement has a slow interlude section in which the two contrapuntal melodies (in counterpoint with one another) are based on my children's names—my daughter Sarah translates to Eb-A-D-A-B and my son
Charlie is Charles, so C-B-A-D-A-E (E for es). I needed a bass rhythm/bass counterweight to these competing voices and realized the weird rhythmic augmentation of *Hold That Tiger*\(^{46}\) that LSU Tiger Marching Band plays. So, I put it in the tubas, which are also the instruments in the marching band that play this, and they end up playing *Hold That Tiger* augmented in an odd way. Nobody in the audience gets it but the two tubas came to me at the premiere and said “the bass notes down there wouldn't happen to be *Hold That Tiger*?” and I said “yes” and they said “okay, we'll play it that way.” So, that’s an example of the inside humor. There's also outside humor, e.g. the third movement of my *Saxophone Concerto* that is a vivacious finale like most concerti. In the end of the development section, there's this back and forth that goes between the saxophone and strings and the saxophone plays this wavy line that keeps going up and up and up until you finally get to the climax and hear a straight quotation from Tchaikovsky (in the saxophone) continued in the strings. The first time we rehearsed it, the string players weren't ready for it and started busting a gut and laughing when they got to it. So, there are sometimes where I'm really overt and sometimes when I'm not so overt. Even in my electro-acoustic music, I try to have a little bit of humor. In the second half of my piece *Unhinged*, the door gets flapping back and forth until it suddenly floats away into the distance, which is why I came up with the name *Unhinged*.

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\(^{46}\) *Hold That Tiger* is one of LSU songs that is mostly played upon the scoring of a touchdown and concluded with a “TIGERS” cheer from the crowd.
Dr. Dinos Constantinides

Biography

Dinos Constantinides is presently Boyd Professor, the highest academic rank at Louisiana State University, and head of the Composition area. His students have been the recipients of national and international awards, including the Presidential Scholar, four MTNA National Composition Awards, and many regional and state awards. Former students also hold professorships in countries all over the world, such as England, China, Brazil, Canada, and the U.S., to name a few.

Constantinides was educated at the universities of Indiana, Michigan State [Ph.D. in Composition], and the Juilliard School. In 2010, he received an honorary doctorate in music from the University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Greece. His teachers in the U.S. included Ivan Galamian, Dorothy DeLay, and Josef Gingold. In addition, he studied violin with the Dutch professor Tony Schultze at the Hellenic Conservatory and with the legendary chamber music teacher Leda Kouroukli, student of Nadia Boulanger, at the Athens Conservatory. This institution, also attended by Maria Callas and Dimitri Mitropoulos, sponsored a concert of his music in celebration of his 85th birthday on November 28, 2014.

His music has been performed by orchestras such as the English Chamber Orchestra, Nuernberger Symphoniker, American Symphony Orchestra, Shenzhen Symphony [China], Bohuslav Martinu Chamber Orchestra, Black Sea Philharmonic [Romania], Filarmonica "Oltenia" [Craiova, Romania], Annapolis Chamber Orchestra, Distinguished Concerts Orchestra International of New York, La Filarmonica de Montevideo [Uruguay], Orquestra Sinfonica de Buenos Aires, and New Orleans Philharmonic. Other performances have been done by the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra of Bratislava, Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic, Ruse
Philharmonic Orchestra [Bulgaria], Dubrovnik Symphony, Czech Moravian Philharmonic, Memphis Symphony, Ku Ming Symphony [China], Rome Festival Orchestra, Prism Orchestra of New York, Polish Radio and TV Orchestra [Krakow, Poland], Bucharest Radio Symphony [Romania], Kiev Philharmonic [Ukraine], and numerous other orchestras in the U.S., Australia and Taiwan. In his homeland, Constantinides' music has been performed by the Cyprus State Orchestra, Thessaloniki State Orchestra, and Athens State Orchestra. In his native country, he has performed with the conductors Hermann Scherchen, Jean Martinon, Clemens Krauss, Leopold Stokowski, Igor Markevitch, and Charles Munch. In the U.S., he has performed with Jean Morel and Izler Solomon.

Constantinides is the recipient of many grants, commissions and awards, including first prizes in the 1981 Brooklyn College International Chamber Competition, 1985 First Midwest Chamber Opera Conference, and 1997 Delius Composition Contest Grand Prize. He also received the 1985 American New Music Consortium Distinguished Service Award, the 1989 Glen Award of l'Ensemble of New York, several Meet the Composer grants, and numerous ASCAP Standard Awards. In 1994 he was honored with a Distinguished Teacher White House commission on Presidential Scholars. He has received excellent press reviews in Europe, China, South America, and the U.S., as well as in the major magazines Fanfare, American Guide, and Gramophone. His music appears on over 65 professional recordings.47

47 Published in LSU School of Music program of LSU Composers Forum concert on February 3, 2020. Visit the following links for more information: https://www.lsu.edu/cmda/music/people/faculty/constantinides.php; https://www.magnipublications.com/biography; https://louisianasinfonietta.org/bios/
Questions and Answers

1. What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?

DINOS CONSTANTINIDES: I always look at the great composers with great techniques and bring those to the students.

2. What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?

CONSTANTINIDES: My number one point is always motivic variation. I point out that the great composers give you a hint right away at the beginning of the piece about what will happen later and then they elaborate on that. An example is Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 that starts with three notes that last throughout the piece. The most important point is to highlight the most important ideas, expand those, and bring them back. You will see a lot of this in atonal and twelve-tone composers.

3. What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?

CONSTANTINIDES: These are the basics that we study in theory. The most important melodies should be presented and heard clearly. I remember when I was in the Greek conservatory, when we had theory, the instructor was always bringing us some materials from Bach and that went very well for the harmony, too. When you have a nice harmony, you should bring it back to hear it again, like melody. Counterpoint is also very important, particularly when it highlights the rhythm. For other compositional concepts, I should highlight that music should not be always horizontal. It should be vertical as well. The master of this is Richard Strauss and a good example is Don Juan. The timbre should change and not be the same all the time. Otherwise, it will be monotonous. These are some of my thoughts.
4. How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?

CONSTANTINIDES: My approach does not differ when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students. I practice all I mentioned in the previous question for both my undergraduate and graduate students. The students should also learn how to create various sonorities and small and big climaxes, and above all how to control the climaxes and anti-climaxes.

5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

CONSTANTINIDES: The first thing that I tell my students is to not copy me. They have to find their own voice. This should start from the very beginning. If they just copy all the time, they will never do something on their own. I would teach them the ideas that I mention in the third question from the very beginning. An example is a student who came to me for his master’s and is now taking a PhD degree with me. He told me that all the music he composed in his bachelor’s was extremely tonal and the first piece that I brought to him, an atonal work of Schoenberg, made him a completely different composer.

6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?

CONSTANTINIDES: Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Brahms, Berlioz, Beethoven, Mozart, Richard Strauss, Ligeti, to name a few.

7. What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?

CONSTANTINIDES: It depends on the students’ interests and the upcoming performance opportunities. Solo pieces are very recommended. But eventually, I want them to work on a
string quartet which I consider the most complete ensemble of all times. Beethoven got the first place in the evaluation of the composers because of his excellent string quartets. Also, eventually orchestra. I encourage operas, as well.

8. **How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?**

**CONSTANTINIDES:** First, I see what the students bring me and which techniques they use. Then, I find the works by great composers who used the same techniques—and received excellent results—and present it to the students. In some ways, I always want students to look at the excellent works of great composers.

9. **How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?**

**CONSTANTINIDES:** I include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session almost for half of the time. I think there should be a specific course in score reading. It is a must for composers of all levels. I do it in my studio once a week. This is an opportunity for the students to look at excellent works of great composers and share ideas.

10. **What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?**

**CONSTANTINIDES:** I take credit to works that consider both horizontal and vertical aspects of a composition. For example, if an entire composition uses only one octave, it will be very monotonous, and I will criticize that. Usually, students are scared to go to the very high notes although the instruments give them the opportunity. For a composition course, in general, I consider 80% of the grade for ten minutes of quality music including lesson attendance, 10% for concert reports and assignments, and 10% for Composers Forum attendance.
11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?

CONSTANTINIDES: One thing: Love music. Never forget to love music. I refer to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who said, “Without music, life would be a mistake”.

12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’ productivity?

CONSTANTINIDES: I usually discuss my thoughts and comments on how to improve a piece on a weekly basis. The students mostly come with great results the following week.

13. What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?

CONSTANTINIDES: I encourage students to participate in concerts, share ideas with other students and see what they do, collaborate with performers, and accept criticism.

14. What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?

CONSTANTINIDES: I hate to repeat what I said before. Love. If you don’t love it, it will never work well.

15. What are some highlights of your composition methodology?

CONSTANTINIDES: I would tell that many of my students have made successful careers as performers/composers, professionals, and professors all over the world. My students have professorships in England, China, Brazil, Canada, and USA, just to name a few. That I consider my most important accomplishment.
Dr. Don Freund

Biography

Don Freund is an internationally recognized composer with works ranging from solo, chamber, and orchestral music to pieces involving live performances with electronic instruments, music for dance, and large theater works.

He has been described as "a composer thoughtful in approach and imaginative in style" (The Washington Post), whose music is "exciting, amusing, disturbing, beautiful, and always fascinating" (Music and Musicians, London). Many of Freund's works are available on commercial CD.

The recipient of numerous awards and commissions, including two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and a Guggenheim fellowship, he has served as guest composer at a vast array of universities and music festivals, and presented master classes throughout Europe, Asia, and South America.

Freund is also active as a pianist, conductor, and lecturer. As a festival coordinator, he has programmed over 1,000 new American works. He has been conductor or pianist in the performance of some 200 new pieces, usually in collaboration with the composer.

A professor of composition at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music since 1992, teaching composition continues to be a major component of Freund's career. His students from 40 years of teaching continue to win an impressive array of awards and recognitions.
Freund's piano concert repertoire extends from new music to complete performances of Bach's WTC Book I and his own pianistic realizations of Machaut. He has performed his Earthdance Concerto with numerous university wind ensembles.48

Questions and Answers

1. **What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?**

**DON FREUND:** Focusing on limited materials, pre-compositional organization, and creating multiple solutions and choice making.

2. **What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?**

**FREUND:** Same as 1.

3. **What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?**

**FREUND:** I am attaching a series of etudes which address these concepts.

4. **How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?**

**FREUND:** Undergrads generally work better with smaller works in terms of length and ensemble size. For group lessons, limited etudes where all are addressing the same issues are most productive.

48 Visit the following websites for more information:  
5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

FREUND: I will ask students to initially come up with their own ideas, but usually end up offering some additional suggestions.

6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?

FREUND: Bach, Beethoven, Bartok, Stravinsky, Ligeti.

7. What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?

FREUND: The important thing is that they have the opportunity to work with the performers in creating a performance.

8. How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?

FREUND: Depends on the project.

9. How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?

FREUND: I ask students to bring a score to every lesson, and spend 5–10 minutes applying lessons from the score to the student’s current work.

10. What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?

FREUND: Creativity, thoughtfulness.

11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?

FREUND: Everything.
12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’ productivity?

FREUND: Always.

13. What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?

FREUND: The teacher must demonstrate an honest enthusiasm for the students’ ideas and goals.

14. What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?

FREUND: Every lesson has a different agenda. Determining that agenda is the most important challenge of teaching composition.

15. What are some highlights of your composition methodology?

FREUND: Please look at the attached etudes and look at my Composition Lessons with JS Bach and Spectrum of 5ths YouTube series. I believe that will give an indication of my methodology.

Dr. Mara Gibson

Biography

Composer Mara Gibson is originally from Charlottesville, VA, graduated from Bennington College and completed her Ph.D. at SUNY Buffalo. She also attended London College of Music as well as L’École des Beaux-Arts in Fontainebleau, France and the International Music Institute at Darmstadt, Germany. She has earned grants and honors from the American Composer’s Forum; the Banff Center; Louisiana Division of the Arts; Arts KC; Meet the Composer; the Kansas Arts Commission National Endowment for the Arts; the International Bass Society; ASCAP, the John Hendrick Memorial Foundation; Virginia Center for the Arts; and Yale University. Recently, she enjoyed a residency at the MacDowell Colony.
Internationally renowned ensembles and soloists perform her music throughout the United States, Canada, South America, Australia, Asia, and Europe.

Gibson’s music has been described as “shocking, gripping and thought-provoking… conjuring a flurry of emotions” (PARMA recordings). She is a regular cross-disciplinary collaborator, having worked with choreographers, visual artists, writers, film makers and musicians. In 2015, Gibson released her first compilation CD, ArtIfacts, with her second recording, Sky-born, following in November 2017 through Navona/Parma Recordings. The latest presents new works including “Blackbird,” which features Cascade Quartet. The music draws inspiration from a variety of artistic mediums: “haunting and epic with visceral energy.” Her piano preludes “Conundrums” are inspired by a series of paintings by Baltimore-based artist Jim Condron and performed by Holly Roadfedlt. Pieces by long-time collaborators Michael Hall, UMKC colleagues and Megan Ihnen are also featured on the new album in “Spark” and “One Voice.”

As Gramophone magazine describes, “repertoire on this recording was mostly inspired by poetry and paintings. What binds these pieces are Gibson’s concise handling of musical materials and her spectrum of sonic approaches.” Sky-born displays a compelling contemporary voice with a restless imagination, able to morph other forms of artistic expression into daring, musical odysseys.”

In August 2017, Gibson was the first-annual commissioned composer for the Baroque on Beaver Orchestra led by Robert Nordling. The ensemble showcased her newest piece, Secret Sky, music inspired by the bird migration patterns on the island. Collaboration is integral to Gibson’s process; whether through her music, collaborations or teaching, she hopes to achieve a relationship between the macro and micro.
Dr. Gibson taught as an Associate Teaching Professor at the UMKC Conservatory of Music and Dance for over ten years, where she was founder of the UMKC Composition Workshop and co-director/founder of ArtSounds. From 2015–2017, she coordinated undergraduate composition, managing to triple the Conservatory’s undergraduate composition enrollment. Gibson has also contributed to New Music Box and in fall 2017, she joined Louisiana State University as a Visiting Assistant Professor; fall 2018, Gibson became Associate Professor of Composition at LSU.\(^49\)

Questions and Answers

1. **What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?**

MARA GIBSON: I think collaborative endeavors with performers—as many as possible, as diverse as possible. When a composer feels an ownership and a responsibility for what he or she writes, and that has to be tested by a performer immediately, then I think that's the best way to help students compose quality music. They hear it and they have insights from the performers. It's more direct, I think, than anything as teachers we can say about their writing. Because we can say that's out of the range, that's not going to sound good, but until students hear it themselves or understands why that doesn't work, it doesn't really become a reality.

2. **What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?**

GIBSON: Determine if it's more head or heart and what their interests are. One of my first questions is what are five pieces that you're listening to right now that you like and why? It can be from any genre, but just to give me a sense of what's going into their ears and what's coming

out and what their preferences are. So, that would be what they're listening to and head or heart. I ask the students what they want to get out of the experience and the piece, whether they're feeling passionate about it, whether they love writing music, whether they don't know (that's OK too), or where do we start? So, once I have some background information, we build a piece together and we go through the planning of it. We start off by mapping and go through the notation process. I don't see my job as done until they hear a performance of their piece. I have students very actively play a role in that process, so it's not enough to just hand me a piece at the end of the semester, but you need to be handing me a piece with a plan of when you're going to get it performed and how you're going to get it performed even second, third, fourth, fifth times after that.

3. What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?

GIBSON: I relay from day one like my students to be able to identify what the parameters are for a piece. So, if timber is a parameter, then certainly we can talk about components of melody or pitch material, harmonic material, rhythmic material, and counterpoint. But it all comes to the root of the piece. So, one of the first exercises I do is have them map out a piece. This on my wall says, “what is it that you want to say and how are you going to say it?” That's the first question that we have to explore. So, that doesn't always necessarily mean that there's going to be a formula for melody, harmony, and counterpoint, and it just doesn't always work in a linear way. Sometimes, I have students that want to do counterpoint much later even though it's more traditionally taught earlier on in a composition course. I really try to be flexible with where the student goes because I think, again, if the student feels an ownership over his or her artistic voice, then it's going to make a big difference whereas if I'm saying this is bad counterpoint or this is not good melodic writing for this instrument, they're not gonna respond. So, it's got to be
this balance between head and heart. I determine what disposition each student has and usually it's imbalanced; either the student needs more head or more heart and I have to adjust that. Now, if the student needs more head than heart, we're going to talk a lot about melody, harmony, counterpoint, and timbre, but also spectralism\textsuperscript{50} and rhythmic ways of creating rhythmic acceleration and deceleration. So, there's all sorts of techniques, but it really depends on what the student wants to do. I do start with all my students writing a solo piece, solo piece for their instrument. So, my first exercise with students is to have them map, so \( x \) being time and \( y \) being these parameters.

4. **How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?**

**GIBSON:** I think it actually doesn't change that much. I really think it's imperative that undergraduates learn very early on that they need to be active in seeking out performers and that's something that you think is more of an expectation for graduate students. For undergrads, maybe you should choose a performance ensemble or an ensemble to play their pieces and orchestrate that. But I don't really make that distinction between my undergraduate and graduate students. I think my graduate students have a better sense, are more mature, and oftentimes have a better sense of what they want to say and how they want to say it whereas undergraduate students don't. So, my aim on any level is to help the composer find his or her voice. We as composers develop in that way for a long time and it takes composers a lot longer than a lot of other professionals to come to their maturity and then oftentimes it changes.

\[\text{spectral music}\text{ refers to music composed mainly in Europe since the 1970s which uses the acoustic properties of sound as the compositional material.}\]

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\textsuperscript{50} Spectral music refers to music composed mainly in Europe since the 1970s which uses the acoustic properties of sound as the compositional material.
5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

GIBSON: That's a good question and again, it goes back to the head or heart. Some students really need prompting. I have one student currently junior going to be a senior undergraduate who is really struggling with being more harmonically adventurous. So, I will nudge him in his pieces to explore that, but again, it's always within the preview of what it is that they want. So, I am definitely more on the side of having the students compose or determine what ideas they want to explore. Now within reason, they say “I want to write a ukulele concerto, and have it play by the Baton Rouge symphony.” I would say that's “highly unrealistic; where's your Ukulele player and how do you anticipate engaging the symphony?” So, it's within reason. More times than not, my students bring their ideas for what they want to do, and we start there.

6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?

GIBSON: Everything from Bach to Beethoven to Mozart, of course. More recently I would say Stravinsky for sure, although he's not very recent anymore. I'd say the biggies for me are Ligeti, Berio, and Feldman. I think as much of a variety as possible. The other thing I do is I make my students look up the Pulitzer prize-winning composers for the last 50 years so they’re familiar with people who are currently writing music.

[Do you have specific works in your mind?]

GIBSON: No, I think it's pretty open. I like the student to dictate that because that helps the student identify with his or her own artistic and aesthetic voice.
7. What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?

GIBSON: Well, it depends. For the undergraduate students, I want them to come out with as broad of a portfolio as possible. So, I really aim for them to come out able to apply to master’s programs. That includes pretty standard string quartet or some sort of ensemble chamber music, woodwind quintet, brass quintet, piano pieces, vocal pieces, and one electronic piece at the very least. I would like to see that breadth over the course of undergrad. I don't really think orchestral music is a requirement although some students really have the incline to write for larger ensembles. If that’s the case, I try to encourage them towards band music because it's something that’ll be performed and something that oftentimes we can contain here, like we can get performed at LSU.

8. How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?

GIBSON: It really depends on what the student brings me each week. Some students are very prepared. I have one currently who is writing more music than any graduate student I've ever seen. She's a sophomore and comes in with a list of questions, listens to everything I give her to listen, and keeps a journal. I have other students that are less directed. So again, it really depends on what the student brings to the lesson. Now if that becomes a pattern, that's a distinction that needs to be made. If the student frequently comes unprepared for lessons or having not written music, then at a certain point, there has to be a hard conversation. “Is this what you want to do? because I can pull out pieces and talk until I'm blue in the face, but if you're not somehow bringing that back into your own voice, it's not meaningful.” So, I guess I split it pretty evenly between creative work. My biggest priority is definitely thinking through compositional projects creatively and coming up with a plan that's consistent. Then, we talk about notational issues—and some of these as we said are head issues—and then listening, going to performances, and
having memory act to performances. Those are all the different activities that I use. Sometimes we're at the piano and I ask them to improvise. One of my first lessons usually involves having the student come up with sonic imagination, so have them look at my Kandinsky\textsuperscript{51} print up there and translate it into music and I give them free reign to do whatever they want; not just playing on the keys but make any kind of sound that they want to. So, I use a variety of different techniques and it all comes back to where the student wants to go. If I'm working with a student that really is having trouble getting in touch with the heart of the piece, then I'm going to have a completely different methodology than if I'm working with a student that is opposite to that. I do strive for a balance though. Listening, score reading, some ear training maybe for earlier on students, but less for more advanced students—being able to sing things. I oftentimes ask my students to sing what they’ve written in their lesson because a lot of times they don't know, and they can't and that's a big test particularly if it's on an instrument that requires production in that area.

9. **How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?**

**GIBSON:** I do divide up my studio: I have individual lessons and I have group lessons for freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors and part of their process is actually interacting with each other and bringing pieces that they're listening and through that, they are required to analyze a piece over the course of the semester, not as a theorist but as a composer, and really dig into a piece that excites them – of course, I'm pretty open with what that might. We listen. We do some listening from week to week. Most of my listening assignments are suggestions based on pieces

\textsuperscript{51} Wassily Wassilyevich Kandinsky (1866–1944) was a Russian painter and art theorist generally credited as the pioneer of abstract art.
that they're working on. If a solo flute piece, then we listen to Varèse’s *Density 21.5*. I have a list of pieces that are good pieces to refer to. So, it's a combination. Sometimes it's listening, sometimes it’s score reading, but most often I would, just for efficiency, assign them pieces and they bring them back next week and we talk about it.

10. What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?

GIBSON: At the very beginning of the session or the course or the semester, I ask them what they want to achieve, and we come up with a contract together. I have adopted since I came here Dinos’s philosophy of 10 minutes of music [Dinos Constantinides, Boyd Professor of Composition, Louisiana State University]. I think it's a great baseline. There are other things to consider: Is it 10 minutes of really interesting music or is it just them trying to get the 10 minutes of music out? So, all of our projects are things that we agreed upon and we revisit usually week to week. “How are you coming in the bigger picture of things? how does that line up with your goals not only for this semester but your goals for your four-year undergraduate experience or your graduate experience? how is that gonna position you uniquely so that you can get to the next place, the next target that you've set?” It's always about the targets that the students have said and it’s definitely different for each student. Everybody has different experiences and comes in with different backgrounds and it needs to be tailored in that way, but there's also an outline for all students and that’s certain quantity of music by all means.

11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?

GIBSON: That's a good question. It's always a balance because you don't want to crush them. Sometimes composition lessons can turn into therapy sessions. I mean it's deep meaningful stuff. It's oftentimes things that are very personal. Something I'm sensitive to is just not crushing their
spirit because that's what helps them to create the music. So, that's important to me. I think feedback can come not just from me. I think the more levels that feedback can occur, the more beneficial. For example, we're doing this vocal collaboration with singers and there are many pieces that I said things to composers over and over again throughout the semester while they were working on these projects and they chose in some cases not to pay attention and we get into the actual reading session or the workshopping and oftentimes when something resonates by two people or three people, then the composer will pay attention, “Oh, that really might be important.” So, I think from a curricular standpoint, we can build a reinforcement in that there's a variety of opinions coming at the student. So, positive feedback is something that I'm a strong advocate for, of course, but also learning how to manage the negative feedback and how to be put on the spot when you're with a performer and they're asking you questions that you might not know the answer to them. I also think this is another place where mentorship can really come in and be beneficial. So, the feedback isn't always dogmatic coming from the composition teacher to the student, but it's a dialogue that happens between the student and the teacher and other students. I think that's what really builds out to a healthy program when everybody is positive. I've been impressed with that with the forum here [LSU Composers Forum]. Actually, seeing how over the course of the year, the undergraduate students have gotten more comfortable and the graduate students have taken on a more of a teaching role. It's a win-win situation because as graduate students you all need teaching experience. So again, I think that just adds to having a healthy department.

12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’ productivity?

GIBSON: Well, I meet with students weekly. If they want to meet with me more, I will. Obviously, there's things that can be more reinforced more regularly and the creative flow state
happens at different rates for different people. So, I would say weekly. To enhance their productivity, again, I think seeing the project through is just as important as writing the project. It's not done just because it's composed. It's only done when it's performed and starts its life.

13. **What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?**

**GIBSON:** I think, again, it has to do with creative thinking first and foremost. If we can all agree on that early on, there’s a lot more investment in the process.

14. **What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?**

**GIBSON:** I think it's seeing them learn through one another but not just me. It takes a village. It’s so important for undergraduates to have input coming from graduate students – master’s and PhD – and professors and instrumentalists. It feels like a safer environment and therefore, they can grow. It’s incredibly fulfilling to see when all that is working on the right level and every tear of the learning is happening. I include teachers in that too because as teachers we have essentially committed to a life of lifelong learning and so we have to model that. It's not just the students; I don't see a real break there between being a teacher and being a student and mentoring happens in all sorts of ways. So, one of my favorite aspects of teaching is seeing how that mentorship really comes to fruition.

15. **What are some highlights of your composition methodology?**

**GIBSON:** Finding your voice creatively. I do a lot of macro and micro mapping, like lens looking at every detail and then zooming out and looking at the big picture and how that fits in and then zooming back in and doing that in a way that will allow the student to chronicle the form and see how all the parts are integrated together. So, mapping (macro and micro), finding your voice, and collaboration. Every semester, I make my students do a collaborative project and
they learn a lot from that. If you want to take a look, I have two articles on how we teach composition that were published in the New Music Box\textsuperscript{52} in 2014. I would highly recommend that you take a look at that.

I think I'm different from a lot of traditional composition teachers in the sense that I don't adhere to the master mentality. I came through the master mentality and what I mean by that is I had one teacher that was telling me what to do and how to do it and that's how I learned, but that's not how I think is best for students to learn. So, I take a much more collaborative approach to that and I talk a lot about that in my article. I think that the benefit or the importance of just finding a student's inherent creativity is an investment. You kind of have to be a musical analyst when you get into somebody's head about writing a piece of music. It's very personal and this is where being kind, patient, and positive, not crushing a student, is important. These are all things that I value.

**Dr. Edward Jacobs**

**Biography**

Edward Jacobs began playing violin at age 8, but abandoned that at age 11 – upon hearing a friend’s jazz quartet – in favor of the saxophone. Undergraduate work at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in jazz performance, and then in composition (Salvatore Macchia, Robert Stern) was followed by graduate study at the University of California, Berkeley in composition (Andrew Imbrie, Olly Wilson, Gerard Grisey), and a doctorate at Columbia University (Chou Wen-Chung, Mario Davidovsky, Marty Boykan, George Edwards).

\textsuperscript{52} Visit [https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/author/mara-gibson/](https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/author/mara-gibson/) for more information.
Jacobs began teaching at East Carolina University in 1998, where he has received three Research/Creative Activity Grants, a prestigious Teacher-Scholar Award, and was named Robert L. Jones Distinguished Professor of Music in 2014. His activities have also included the founding and direction of the North Carolina NewMusic Initiative, begun in March 2001. That initiative includes a concert series, a unique student-driven commissioning program, and collaborating with local elementary and middle school general music teachers in the “Young Composers Project,” an outreach component of the NC NewMusic Initiative which seeks to make the creation of music a fundamental part of children’s education.

Jacobs’ work as a composer has been recognized by a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Charles Ives Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts & Letters, among other awards. The American Academy’s citation reads “Jacobs’s music masters the ‘virtual’ and ‘real’ sound habitats and embeds them into a unified and consistent single space with grace, broad orchestral imagination and expressivity. Jacobs’s music is immediately engaging, attractive and intellectually demanding.”

Jacobs’ music is written for a variety of forces, from soloists to chamber ensembles, orchestra, concerto, choir, and electronic media. His music is published by C. F. Peters Corp., NY, APNM and ACA. Recordings of Aural History (clarinet & piano) and A Function of Memory (clarinet & fixed media) are available on Open G Records, Passed Time (brass quintet) is on Innova Records (#943, “Seven Kings”), and Release (orchestra) is on ABlaze Records (Orchestral Masters Vol. 6). Recordings of Palladium (soprano & piano), al momento (cello &
fixed media), *The Line Between* (soprano & fixed media), and *Addressing Wonder* (viola, cello, and piano) are forthcoming on Open G Records in 2020.\textsuperscript{53}

Questions and Answers

1. What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?

EDWARD JACOBS: In short, 3 things: listening to what others do/have done; building skills through appropriately proportioned exercises; listening to feedback from performers and other composers. More specifically:

- Basic approaches involve a lot of listening to a wide variety of music;
- assigning particular pieces for listening and score study to focus a young composer on particular approaches/skills;
- small writing exercises involving development of ideas;
- small writing exercises focusing on the nature of musical phrases’ beginnings, middles, ends, and endings.
- Exercises focusing on harmony/melody relationship;
- Exercises focusing on rhythm, rhythm contrast, rhythmic development.
- Sharing ideas and pieces-in-progress with colleagues
- Observing other students’ lessons
- Sharing writing examples with instrumental/vocal colleagues for feedback.

Over time, the exercises build in duration, instrumentation, etc.

\textsuperscript{53} Visit the following websites for more information: https://music.ecu.edu/about-us/faculty-staff-information/edward-jacobs/; https://edwardjacobs.org/bio/; https://edwardjacobs.org/.
2. What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?

JACOBS: Listening to unfamiliar works with open ears.

Speed-writing exercises (to make clear that one can always do some writing, that huge blocks of time aren’t always necessary).

First sessions are about single lines, about parts of phrases (beginnings, middles, ends).

3. What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?

JACOBS: Many textbooks and essays written on this incredibly over-broad question.

My thoughts are that each of these concepts are vital to creating a musical structure, and each can (and should) be isolated in a few exercises so that students can both explore each parameter, realize the power/influence of each parameter, and begin to feel comfortable with developing individual ways (and know other models) to construe each’s contribution to the whole of a piece.

4. How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?

JACOBS: I find it important to work with each student as an individual, rather than based on their year in school. [The only ways in which graduate students are usually different is in their level of maturity—although this is certainly not always the case.]

Some undergraduate freshmen are far more sophisticated, and far more musically literate, than MM students, and the work undertaken by each needs to be appropriate to their level of understanding, sophistication, maturity, and compositional development.
Private lessons often involve more personal communications, i.e., students tend to share (overshare) elements of the goings-on in their lives. Working with students to harness their emotional energies, to use music/composition as a means of expression, etc., becomes part of private lessons, at times. Thankfully not too often, but at least once/semester with most students.

Classes are a different dynamic, as elements of pride surface, sometimes leading to defensiveness, etc. So, classes are a good forum for talking about what we all share as composers, the difficulties of making decisions, taking chances, etc.

The most fruitful element of class composition is the common assignment. By all having to face a problem (really, just about any assignment), they really come to appreciate the varying approaches taken by their colleagues. Class assignments always lead to more open ears, more appreciation for varying perspectives, and the broadening sense of possible solutions to problems.

5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

JACOBS: Only in the earliest exercises of a composition class do I provide initial ideas. Typically I work with the student to get them to generate ideas, and then to evaluate ideas’ potential for expansion/development.

6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?

JACOBS: Berio Sequenzas; Brahms Symphonies; Beethoven late quartets; Palestrina Masses; Debussy’s preludes and orch works; Copland Piano Variations (and Orchestra Variations), Abrahamsen’s Schnee; Davies’ Eight Songs for a Mad King; Ligeti’s piano etudes; Kurtag song
fragment cycles; George Benjamin’s *Written On Skin*; and I also try to refer to works of my colleagues.

7. **What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?**

**JACOBS:** We like our students to write for instruments in all families, if not every instrument/voice. So, we encourage ensembles and/or solo/duos that include winds, brass, strings, keyboard, percussion, and voice. We encourage both small and large, standard and non-standard groupings, but most of all we want students to write for ensembles that will play their music. I suggest students begin with small/solos, then expand.

I like for students to have a string quartet, a few songs, perhaps wind and brass 5tets—but I do not suggest these unless I know there are currently strong ensembles who are willing to take on new pieces.

8. **How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?**

**JACOBS:** Lessons usually begin with the student reviewing their notes on the week’s listening/score study assignment. We might listen to a particular moment, or address questions in the score re orchestration, notation, harmony, etc., before I’ll ask what they might imagine stealing from this piece/composer.

We shift to what the student’s writing, and I read it through. I ask them what specific questions/moments/concerns they have, and we address those first.

I then put the work in the context of the larger, ongoing piece, leading to discussions/comments re formal design, proportion, contrast, etc.
There’s usually a moment during which we address something about notation, perhaps consulting a reference (Gould’s *Behind Bars*).

A listening assignment usually closes a lesson, with a few specific questions relating something about the assigned piece and an issue they’re facing in their current project.

9. How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?

JACOBS: See question 8; basically, the content of these assignments are determined based on whatever context is arising in the student’s current project.

10. What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?

JACOBS: I am concerned with work ethic, consistency of work, the thoughtfulness a student brings to their work and its critique. Perhaps most importantly, I’m interested in seeing if students are willing to stretch themselves, to try new things, to evaluate the limitations of their habitual tendencies.

11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?

JACOBS: For any feedback to be helpful, it needs to be heard, understood and internalized. For any particular student, one needs to consider their ability to hear critique (whether positive or negative), put it in perspective as constructive critique on their work (rather than commentary on them as a person), and internalize the comments in a way that is helpful to future growth.

Perhaps most importantly for me as a teacher, after I provide a comment, I ask them to say it back to me so that I get a sense of what they heard. Then I ask them how they react to that comment; then how that comment’s processing might lead to new ideas and/or approaches on their part.
12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’ productivity?

**JACOBS:** In every lesson I provide extensive feedback on the micro and macro perspective of their work, both conceptually and technically.

At every concert of student works, or reading session, I ask for their feedback about their experience(s) of their music and that of their colleagues.

13. What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?

**JACOBS:** Engaging other arts—literature, film, drama, visual arts, dance—are a high priority, as is engagement, collaboration and/or dialogue with artists in other media.

14. What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?

**JACOBS:** Similar to any teaching, the most challenging aspect is leading students to evaluate their own decisions and decision-making processes.

15. What are some highlights of your composition methodology?

**JACOBS:** Guest artists for hearing pieces:

- they’re ‘teachers for the day’
- opportunities for students to hear their music/ideas realized by experts
- opportunity to learn what’s possible beyond writing for their peers
- exposing them to the importance of networking, of being sociable, of engaging musicians as people (not servants)
Commissioning program:

- learn the process of commissioning and all its steps\textsuperscript{54}
- they engage a composer throughout their stages of these commissions
- exposure to multiple composers and their varying approaches to the process
- lessons/Master Classes with these visiting composers
- Small group discussions about career matters, about choosing graduate programs, applying for jobs, etc.

Weekly colloquium:

- Public speaking
- Seeing faculty and more senior student colleagues speak about their work and/or work in progress
- Seeing faculty model healthy, encouraging, supportive, even if challenging, inquiry
- Exchange of ideas that’s different than a class; sometimes just a presentation on “I find this interesting, and don’t yet have any answers or tremendous insights. But I thought you might also find it intriguing.”
- Presentations by applied instrumental faculty on writing for specific instruments

\textsuperscript{54} Refer to the article “What if we all play a role in creating new music?” published at East Carolina University School of Music website, \url{https://music.ecu.edu/nc-newmusic-initiative/new-ideas/}. 
Dr. James Mobberley

**Biography**

Dr. James Mobberley is Curators’ Professor of Music at the UMKC Conservatory of Music and Dance, where he has been a member of the faculty since 1983. He is a primary architect of the composition program, which has grown to include 50+ composition majors, from freshman through doctoral levels. He is much in demand as a guest composer, with lectures, master classes and workshops in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, China, and Korea. Venues in the U.S. include Stanford University, Yale University, the University of California-Berkeley, Indiana University, the Peabody Conservatory, the University of Texas at Austin, and over forty other schools, festivals, and conferences.

Rome Prize winner and Guggenheim Fellow James Mobberley’s works span many media, from orchestra and electro-acoustic music to music for dance, film, and video. His works have received over 1300 performances worldwide. Two dozen recordings feature his music, including the Black Canyon, Bridge, Capstone, Centaur, Everglade, and Troppa Note labels, as well as an all-Mobberley recording on the Albany label recorded by the Czech National Symphony.

He received commissions from Fromm Foundation at Harvard University, Koussevitzky Foundation/Library of Congress, Barlow Endowment, Meet the Composer, Chamber Music America, National Endowment for the Arts, and numerous ensembles and individual performers. He also received awards from American Academy of Arts and Letters, American Academy in Rome, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, League-ISCM, Meet the Composer, Van Cliburn Foundation, Shanghai Spring Festival, and numerous other organizations.
Selected as a 2009 Fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Center, he has also been a Resident Composer with the Kansas City Symphony (1992-1999), and a Visiting Composer with both the Taiwan National Symphony (1999) and the Fort Smith Symphony (2000).

He has served on professional panels and nominating committees for organizations that include the American Academy in Rome, the Fromm Foundation, the Barlow Endowment, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Civitella Ranieri Center, the Fulbright Fellowships, New Music USA, the MacDowell Colony, the MidAtlantic Arts Foundation, the Bush Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, I-Park, the Fisher Competition and the Missouri Arts Council.55

Questions and Answers

1. **What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?**

   **JAMES MOBBERLEY:** Each student arrives with a unique background and a unique set of skills. Each also arrives with a unique ear, and writes music that is unique among the student group. Over 37 years of college composition teaching I’ve reconfigured my teaching many times, often to suit a particular collection of students, or even an individual student. The overall method I’ve settled on, and used for the last 15 years, is three-fold:

   a. On the first day of the semester I request three scores and recordings of each new student’s work, preferably in different genres. I review these and write a description of what I am seeing and hearing in each work, as well as in the three works as a whole. Then at our first private lesson we read and discuss my description and, most importantly, I ask the student whether my impressions align with theirs. This gives us

55 Visit the following websites for more information: https://jamesmobberleymusic.com/bios-info/; https://jamesmobberleymusic.com/.
a common starting point for conversations about new works as they progress during the semester.

b. I provide both private lessons and group lessons in alternation from week to week. This gives every student individual one-on-one time with the instructor, and gives students the benefit of hearing feedback from peers and providing feedback to peers. All these experiences are beneficial, and all play a role in deepening the student’s understanding of how their musical voice develops and their place in the larger compositional world.

c. In subsequent weeks, which alternate between private and small group lessons with 3-6 students, the topic of conversation is exclusively the current piece-in-progress. When technical issues surface, such as those regarding orchestration, voice leading, etc., we focus entirely on how these might best function in the piece at hand, rather than on general concepts. At our school we are fortunate to have excellent colleagues in theory, history/style, and orchestration who teach the broad concepts of these topics, so that composition lessons can focus on issues within specific pieces. Together these approaches yield both a solid background as well as ideal functioning of elements within individual student works. If it might be helpful for a student to review a pre-existing work, I will recommend it and we may spend some time talking through relevant material, but this does not happen as a matter of course. Again, if the piece at hand would benefit, such a review may be time well-spent.

2. What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?

**MOBBERLEY:** As described in Question 1, above, the two foci in private lessons are to

*Determine the Student’s Intent,* and *Teach to the Piece.* These are described more fully in as
handouts in my Composition Pedagogy Course materials, in the *Teaching Music Composition* section of my website www.jamesmobberleymusic.com. In group lessons, the focus is on developing the ability to describe and take suggestions on works-in-progress, and to provide helpful and well-reasoned feedback to others on their work. Of course, I also provide feedback, both on the presented work, and on the discussion.

One other important thing that I try to stress in the first few lessons is that I, as the instructor, actually have no expectations as to what students should know already before starting lessons – we begin where they are, and with what they know (and don’t know). I also have no “preferences” regarding structure or detail for their music, much less style. They are required to write music, and it should be *their music*, not mine, and not in the style of anyone else, though we can adapt the work of others to suit our own goals.

3. **What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?**

**MOBBERLEY:** As mentioned above, I believe that instruction of these topics as broad concepts belongs in classes that are devoted strictly to them, rather than in composition lessons. Their use *as it pertains to a new individual piece* most certainly could be part of a conversation within a composition lesson.

4. **How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?**

**MOBBERLEY:** Very little, especially when working with individual pieces. Developing good interactivity skills in group lessons is more fundamental in undergraduate groups, though occasionally we spend time on this in graduate groups, especially when discussing composition pedagogy.
5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

MOBBERLEY: My job is to assist students in whatever ways will be the most helpful to them in creating their work. Because every student is different, how I do this varies greatly from student to student and can take considerable time to find the right methods to suggest. Sometimes I find the best methods only after several interactions with a student, and on rare occasions, I more or less fail to be of much help – this can be because the student already knows, comprehensively, what they want to accomplish and how to do so; it can also be because the student has serious issues with their own creativity and process that get in the way of their ability to make progress, despite my best efforts to come up with truly helpful suggestions.

6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?

MOBBERLEY: I don’t refer to other works very often, largely because it’s so difficult to find works that relate very directly to the specific piece being written and the specific issues that have arisen. Here are a couple of examples of some pieces I often bring up for more common issues: brass writing: Donald Erb’s *Brass Concerto*; speech-rhythm vs. non-speech rhythm in choral music: Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms*, mingling more-harmonically based materials with less-harmonically based materials: Joseph Schwantner’s *And the Mountains Rising Nowhere*. I’ll also grab a score of mine for a very specific reference, such as using both metric and non-metric notation in a single piece, or placing cues and timings in scores for instrument and fixed media playback (*Vox Inhumana*), etc.
7. What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?

MOBBERLEY: We typically require that undergraduate students compose for at least four of six possible instruments/ensembles during their degrees: chamber music, choral & vocal, electronic & computer, orchestra and/or wind ensemble, ethnic instruments. For graduate students, we look at their history and recommend filling in any gaps. Doctoral students may elect to focus more specifically on one or more genres if they have covered most or all of the bases in their earlier degrees.

8. How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?

MOBBERLEY: See Questions 1 & 2.

9. How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?

MOBBERLEY: We have arranged for lab sessions for freshmen and sophomores that cover some repertoire along with basic orchestration and notation skills. For juniors, seniors and graduate students there is a weekly forum with guest presenters covering repertoire, techniques and other topics. This allows us to keep the focus on current student work in lessons.

10. What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?

MOBBERLEY: Evaluation and grading are two of the most difficult aspects of teaching in creative fields. Since students’ backgrounds and compositional interests vary considerably, we gauge student success individually, rather than on a uniform scale for all. My own grading procedure is based on attendance, participation in group lessons, and on consistent weekly progress for each student in their current works. Here is the wording from my most recent syllabus: “Grading is based entirely on consistent progress on the project during the semester. A
week here or there with little or no work done is understandable – other commitments in life
demand our time in unequal bursts – but two or three weeks in a row is not good for the assisted
composition process in a collegiate program. Assume a minimum grade of A- for the class unless
you hear otherwise from me during the semester.”

11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?
MOBBERLEY: The most effective feedback is in response to students’ questions and issues
that they bring up in lessons. Hence I ask as many questions as possible before giving opinions.
This helps me to provide the kind of guidance a student needs first. Unrequested feedback does
play an important role when an instructor senses that things aren’t working well or notices
specific errors in notation, orchestration, etc., but ideally the bulk of the interaction stems
initially from the student’s questions and responses to the instructor’s questions.

12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’
productivity?
MOBBERLEY: Constantly. Conversations include not just the music at hand but the nature of
the student’s individual creative process. Roadblocks to progress are many, and can become
detrimental if left unexplored and [un]discussed.

13. What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process
of creative thinking?
MOBBERLEY: In rare cases, a student will compose a piece of music almost completely in a
previously defined style. This is most common among freshmen, who may still be under the
impression that composing ‘correctly’ is expected in college. It is my task in these situations to
(again) ask questions, perhaps beginning with “you obviously know and love Beethoven’s music
and write it effectively…where do you want to take it now that you’ve done the hard work of
mastering it? Where are you excited about going next?” And perhaps, to be more specific, I might ask something like “you mentioned that you also love Frank Zappa’s music…what would it be like to mix Zappa with Beethoven in the same piece?”

14. What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?

MOBBERLEY: The same aspect that provides so much joy – each student is unique, with a unique background, a unique personality, a unique set of ears, and a unique set of dreams for their future composing and working life. The learning process in the creative arts makes use of required skills, but the result is never pre-determined. There are no right answers, only different options. Helping students create the piece that truly reflects what they are experiencing in their ears, and opening doors of possibility that help them achieve this, is always a challenge, and always incredibly rewarding. I can’t imagine having had a better career.

15. What are some highlights of your composition methodology?

MOBBERLEY: I’ll refer you to the two methodology handouts on my website https://jamesmobberleymusic.com/teaching-music-composition/; let me know if you have questions. See the links Mobberley Teaching Methodology – Determining Intent.complete and Mobberley Teaching Methodology – Teach to the Piece.complete.
Dr. Jeffrey Perry

Biography

Dr. Jeffrey Perry is Manship Professor of Music Theory at Louisiana State University. Dr. Perry was born in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts and holds degrees from Williams College (B.A. 1982), the California Institute of the Arts (M.F.A. 1984), and Princeton University (Ph.D. 1990). He has taught at LSU since August 1994 and was formerly a member of the music faculty of Duke University (1990-92) and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1993-94). He was twice chosen as a Fellow of the Mannes Institute for Advanced Studies in Music Theory (2004, 2006).

Recent publications include “’A Quiet Corner Where We Can Talk’: Cage’s Satie, 1948-58” (Contemporary Music Review 33:5-6) and “Cage’s Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano: Performance, Hearing and Analysis” (Music Theory Spectrum 27:1). His essay “Mel Powell and the String Quartet” appears in Intimate Voices: Aspects of Construction and Character in the Twentieth-Century String Quartet (University of Rochester Press, 2008). His work has also been published in Perspectives of New Music, Journal of Musicology, Nineteenth Century Music, Music Theory Online, Indiana Theory Review, and College Music Symposium. He has presented work at colloquia and conferences in the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Taiwan as well as in the United States and Canada. Teaching interests include 20th century music, American musical experimentalism, Schubert, Schenker, and music/text relations. He has taught in the LSU in London and Edinburgh summer program, and currently teaches in both the LSU School of Music and the Ogden Honors College, serving also as an affiliate faculty member in the LSU program in Comparative Literature.
Dr. Perry’s composition teachers have included Mel Powell, Morton Subotnick, Paul Lansky and Peter Westergaard. He has also worked with Pierre Boulez, Milton Babbitt, and Earle Brown. He has composed choral, orchestral, electro-acoustic, and chamber music. His recent works have been performed at LSU, the Ohio State University, the University of Connecticut, the State University of Minas Gerais, and elsewhere.56

Questions and Answers

1. What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?

JEFFREY PERRY: I think that one thing that my teacher Morton Subotnick said to me is very valuable that composer really has to have three little people inside his head at all times. The composer person has the initial idea. The performer person tries it out in some way, explores its implications and difficulties, and plays it back for the composer. There may be an interaction of feedback and a modification that happens at stage, but in any case, once the performer has the idea, has spun out the idea to a certain step, there's an audience person that's in there, that listens to the performer’s realization of the idea and gives feedback, and the feedback happens there as well. And so, thinking in terms of how it's going to sound, how it's going to be played, you have to put yourself in those positions to be a composer. You can't neglect those other two parts of this triad of listening and realization.

2. What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?

PERRY: I'd like to know where the students are coming from. I don't think of them as a vessel into which you pour knowledge. I need to know what they need and why they came to me. So,

56 Biography provided by Dr. Jeffrey Perry. Visit the following website for more information: https://www.lsu.edu/cmda/music/people/faculty/perry.php.
there's some neutral exercises I like to assign. First of all, as I said, species counterpoint is a great way to begin. But, one of the things that Subotnick had us all do at the beginning is write a piece for just a single-line instrument. It can be a flute, it can be a voice, it can be anything, but the piece has to have no more than one note. You can take that note and do any number of things to it, but you must stay on that note. How do you generate contrast and form with just that few resources? It's like taking away all the crayons in a box of crayons and saying you love red. what can you do with this one red crayon? So, that's something I'd like to do.

3. **What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?**

**PERRY:** I think counterpoint is incredibly important. It's sort of the basis for how I teach music theory as well as composition. The beginning of modern compositional theory is in a book called *Gradus ad Parnassum* by Johann Joseph Fux which you can still buy it in a convenient inexpensive paperback English translation. Species counterpoint is an excellent tool for learning the process of making compositional choices and trade-offs between things you want to do and things you have to do because of the constraints of whatever system you're operating in. Just training your mind using species counterpoint is incredibly useful. It doesn't have to be species or other kinds of counterpoint. You can learn just to make the same kinds of decisions. But I like focusing on counterpoint. So that's sort of the basis for me. And in that context, you learn an awful lot about melody, and it may not seem like it, but you're learning a lot about rhythm, pacing, accents, and even form. So, that's where I begin.

4. **How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?**

**PERRY:** Undergraduates have a much more varied background, especially in the 21st century, than graduate students. There’s a lot that one could assume that an undergraduate of my era
knew (Schoenberg, neo-classicism, jazz fusion, early minimalism) that may be completely outside the experience (curricular or extra-curricular) of an undergraduate composer today. On the other hand, that undergraduate composer might know music and musical technology of which I’m utterly unaware—the things you can do with $1000 of computer equipment today, for example, plus some free software and an Internet connection would’ve been complete science fiction twenty years ago. So, meeting a younger student where they come to you is very important: respecting their unique experiences and finding out what led them to want to study composition is step one. Step two might be filling in what I consider gaps in historical knowledge, but even here I’d try to avoid deleting their own understanding of what’s important about contemporary music. I’m not going to tell anyone to stop listening to whatever it is that they find nourishing and inspiring, but I might point out that Charles Ives or Ruth Seeger did it first!

Graduate students must have a more comprehensive grounding. Everything that holds true for undergrads is still true, of course, but they do need historical perspective. And a huge struggle for every composition student I meet today is to get beyond the siren song of the plastic, artificial MIDI patches that are, in many cases, the main sounds that are in the ears of composition students today. They have so few opportunities to hear their music played on actual instruments, those damned Finale or Sibelius playback buttons can crowd out the physicality and temporality of real music as it is performed. Things are a bit different for electro-acoustic composers, of course, but I’d hope that the latter would spend enough time in the acoustic world to acquire a sense of the difference between real, sweating flesh-and-blood players and a machine as well.
5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

PERRY: If I thought they needed an idea, I would give them an idea. But almost every student I've ever known has come to me with ideas already. Ideas aren't the problem. It's presenting them, implementing them, developing them, and packaging them that's the problem. Sometimes, I think that we have focused too much in ideas, but really what you need to do is help a student interrogate their initial idea and figure out what it requires in terms of going somewhere and continuing. So, those are some things I think about.

6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?

PERRY: I like using Bartok’s *Mikrokosmos* because of course they were written as teaching pieces, not just for pianist but also for composers. I like using art songs from various periods of time and various composers, because they tend to do an awful lot in a very small space. I like to use Haydn because I think that his chamber music especially is very easy to pull apart and get things from. And there are others from the 20th century that I could name that are probably on everybody's list. Those are just a few that stick out for me as pedagogically very useful.

7. What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?

PERRY: I would suggest first and foremost vocal music. Solo vocal music because it's a great way to learn how to set a text and how to relate music to words. It doesn't have to be an accompanied art song with the usual piano accompaniment. It can be with a solo melodic instrument if that's more appropriate for the given student. Choral music is incredibly important. Unaccompanied acapella choral music is a very important teaching medium. Small-set ensembles that are easy to write for and easy to get defined, for instance string quartet,
woodwind quintet, and brass quintet, are all very good to write for. You might even get the pieces played if you have friends in those groups. They each have different timbral and technical challenges. Obviously, there are more transpositions, clefs, and colors to deal with in wind quintet.

One thing I'd suggest is that students should write for real ensembles and hear in terms of those ensembles and not in terms of the midi mock-ups that come with notation programs like Finale and Sibelius. It's very important to get them out of the habit of listening to the way those programs make you think your music is heard. Those software like that can lie to you about pacing, about how hard something is to play, and how idiomatic it sounds. It can lie to you about balance and dynamics. So, it's important to actually write and get the feedback for these ensembles. So, it's more important to write for any given ensemble or group of instruments and get it played than to hear something perfectly in your head and write for an ensemble that's not going to play it.

8. **How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?**

**PERRY:** Let's say I have an hour with a student. I suppose I would try to divide it evenly between figuring out/catching up with them in terms of what they've been up to since the last time we met. Then at some point, we have to decide what we're doing next. That’s just about the only structure that I impose on the lesson.

9. **How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?**

**PERRY:** I have a certain list of certain number of pieces, as I said, I like to use as teaching pieces. But then there are other pieces that are just things that you should have in your ears. For example, I would put, in terms of the 20th century core repertoire that I know best, a large
number of works by Stravinsky because I think almost everything you need to know about sonority and form, you can find it somewhere in Stravinsky. I would put a certain number of Second Viennese works, especially the shorter works of Webern, because I think that if you listen carefully, it doesn't have to be all about set classes and tone rows; there's an awful lot there about gesture and small-scale form as well.

As I said, Bartok is an amazing composer to look at. I've tried to expand my core to include works by Ruth Crawford who's an amazingly great composer – I wish she'd composed more – and a few other American composers [like] Charles Ives who’s a huge influence on me. I'd like composers to listen to Ives partly for the problems his music poses; thinking of his music as a series of problems as much as series of solutions. So those are just a few random thoughts on that.

10. What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?

PERRY: Is it honest to itself? Is there real listening that's gone into it? Is it really composed in a way that suggests that the composers put themselves in the position of the performer and the eventual listener? Because I think those are the important things to do, to be able to assume both of those roles while you're composing; to be composer, performer, and listener all at one.

11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?

PERRY: Again, I need to listen, and I need to figure out what they need rather than what I think that they should hear. Sometimes, the right comment at the wrong time can be as discouraging and damaging as the wrong comment at the right time. So, I try to be tactful and I try to be careful. Teaching one-on-one is something that I don't do as much as teaching in a classroom situation. It's also very easy for a composition lesson to become a kind of a therapy session and it
can become emotionally very intense. You're hitting people in their comfort zone and their sense of self-evaluation. It's important to realize what a trust has been placed on you when you're teaching students either one-on-one or in a group.

12. **How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’ productivity?**

**PERRY:** The right ratio of listening to given notes is hard to figure out. Sometimes, things are more interacted with certain students, so I can listen to just a little bit of what they want to do and give them feedback along the way. Sometimes, I need to listen for a long time and give them an overall perspective. So, that's something that really depends on the dynamic I create with the student.

13. **What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?**

**PERRY:** I try to get them performing and listening and engaging with one another as much as possible. Peer learning is probably the more important part of any given curriculum. It might be 40 percent from your teacher, but it's 60 percent from your peers and from others. I think that it's really important to composers, especially speak to each other, bounce ideas off each other, and critique each other. The experiences, the good experiences, I had in graduate school for instance, were all in a seminar room with my fellow students, with the professor ideally staying out of the way as much as guiding us.

14. **What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?**

**PERRY:** I think the most challenging part for me is to set my own background aside and realize that I'm not training them to be another me, that I'm training them to be the best composer they can be. In other words, I need to shed the presets that I have, the strong inclination in favor of
Avant-garde art music and experimental music. I've realized that not every student comes to me having listened to the music I've listened to and wanting to make the musical experiences that I've made. So, listening is an incredibly important part of teaching on every level.

15. What are some highlights of your composition methodology?

PERRY: Not sure I have any, but I hope I do. I suppose that the highlight is getting a student to follow an idea through from its inception to its successful presentation. Really feeling like an initial sound image has matured into a satisfying musical hall and that's really the only thing that matters at the end of the day.

Dr. Paul Rudy

Biography

Paul Rudy is a composer, performer, professor, author, photographer, land artist, and harmonization coach. He has been called “the High Priest of Sound” and his music, ranging from film scores to sound healing, has been described as “the universe unfolding one sound at a time.” His photography takes the viewer “to a beautiful cosmic place where scale and time have no meaning,” and challenges us “to see an entirely obvious but rarely contemplated reality.” He also builds sacred spaces on 70 acres in Eastern Kansas that can be seen from Google Earth.

Rudy is a Rome Prize (2010), Guggenheim (2008), Fulbright (1997) and Wurlitzer Foundation (2007 and 2009) Fellow, and in 2012 won two Global Music Awards for Innovation in Sound and Mixing/Editing. Other awards include the Sounds Electric ’07 Competition (1st Prize), EMS Prize (Sweden, 1st Prize), Citta di Udine (Prize ex aequo, 2008), and has received recognition and commissions from IMEB, Bourges, SEAMUS, Meet the Composer, the American Composer’s Forum, SCI, National Music Teachers’ Association.
He is Curators’ Distinguished Professor and Coordinator of Composition at the UMKC Conservatory in Kansas City where he won the 2008 Kauffman Award for Artistic Excellence, and the 2019 Muriel McBrien Kauffman Faculty Service Award. In 1994 he completed the Colorado Grand Slam after climbing all 54 of Colorado’s 14,000 ft. peaks.57

Questions and Answers

1. What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?

PAUL RUDY: I have learned to ask a lot of questions, to make sure I understand what a student is trying to do in their music. The biggest thing I have learned is to focus on what is actually IN the music that they are presenting in their lesson, rather than what is missing, or perceived as lacking. If the student’s music is conservative harmonically, for example, and I think that they should expand their toolbox, I would do that by looking at areas where they are pushing their own language, even with just a simple accidental, and help them with ways to do that more, or expand slightly on it.

2. What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?

RUDY: Finding out what is important to a student. What are their musical values? What music do they listen to? Who are their musical heroes? I also believe in putting my biases out on the table (maybe preferences is a better word). I want them to also know what I value, so that they can make a choice whether to follow through on my suggestions.

57 Visit the following links for more information: https://paulrudy.net/about.html; https://info.umkc.edu/cmad-comp/faculty/; https://paulrudy.net/.
3. What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?

RUDY: All of these things should be taught within the framework of what the student is showing me! First and foremost, these conversations would stem from the music of the students in front of us. From their I might make suggestions that they look at some of these things in composers who have similar interests, but maybe a wider range of expression.

4. How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?

RUDY: My approach is not different except that I might push graduate students harder to find their own voice. I also push students to explore their concepts deeper, so we might talk more about what the work is about, and how they are expressing that. My job as a teacher is to help generate and spin ideas with the student, and let them choose the right path or technique or application of whatever we are focusing on.

5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

RUDY: Rarely does a student come to me without either an idea, or a work already in progress! If they don’t have anything or idea, I might suggest they think about composing about something that is going on in their lives.

6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?

RUDY: Bartok, Beethoven, Crumb, Stravinsky, Part and occasionally Bach
7. **What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?**

**RUDY:** We encourage our students to write for all instrument groups (in solo and chamber settings). Grad students should have at least one large ensemble work, and many of our undergrads do too.

8. **How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?**

**RUDY:** All composition lessons are student driven, and focus on what they are working on. I rarely bring an agenda. One exception might be when I teach sophomores. During that class, I require them to track how much and when they compose every day during the week. We discuss this “log” at the beginning of the lesson. The purpose is not for me to police how much they are working, but to help them see and begin to understand what works for them, and when they tend to succeed at sitting down to compose. Is there time of day that they are more productive? Do they need x amount of time to get anything done, or can they work in small bursts or chunks. I want them to be able to see patterns in their process of when they succeed, so they can train themselves HOW to succeed with their composition time. In this way, I hope that students will begin to enjoy the process of composing as much as the result.

9. **How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?**

**RUDY:** As needed, based on what the student is doing. I might suggest they listen to something for expanding sonic ideas, or learning a technique.

10. **What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?**

**RUDY:** I have two grades for undergrads every week. I type comments directly into Canvas during the lesson, so we can both remember what we talked about, and the student can re-read
what we covered. One grade is a student self-assessment: how do they feel like they did (in terms of time, productivity, forward motion, etc.). Then, at the end of the lesson, I assign a grade. This gives me more to help determine a grade at the end of the semester, as opposed to just subjectively basing the grade on the finished product. It really is also about tracking process. Their process!

11. What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?

RUDY: How to present something. I try to be graceful, and kind and helpful. The most effective things are when we push harder on what they are already doing. There are always seeds of the student’s expansion already nested in their work. I look for those seeds, and together we water and nurture them into more mature ideas.

12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’ productivity?

RUDY: Weekly meetings. The best way to enhance the student’s productivity, is to help them get to know their process and what works for them!

13. What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?

RUDY: We practice that in lessons by just generating ideas. Sometimes it focuses on what to do with something they already have, and other times generating as many ways as possible to look at something from a different angle.

Students get writer’s block and a decade or more ago, I figured out why. It’s nearly always because we are making assumptions that we are not aware we are making. Go home, take a step back, and figure out what we are assuming about things that we are not aware we are assuming,
and then either choose that assumption, or get rid of it, and floodgates open. I’ve tried this with students and professionals, as well as myself, and it works every time!

Assumptions and judgments are CREATIVITY KILLERS!

14. What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?

RUDY: Keeping my own preferences out of the way. What I like and dislike is irrelevant to a student’s work. Staying focused on helping them do whatever they want to do, to the best of their ability is priority no. 1 for me!

I NEVER evaluate something as good or bad. I work really hard to keep judgment out of the conversation. Instead, I focus on helping the student[s] clarify what they want to do. We always work on preferences, not judgements.

15. What are some highlights of your composition methodology?

RUDY:

• I can compose quickly if an idea has germinated enough in my mind, body and spirit
• I feel like music comes through me, not from me
• I am an aural based composer, so with technology, I work directly with sound and use every available too[l].
• I have two rules of composing: 1) there are no rules and 2) there is no such thing as cheating!
• I am very intuitive now.
• I do not think about form, but instead flow and structure.
• I follow what the material wants to do (especially in EA music), rather than imposing what I want onto the material. I try to find the internal workings of material, and play those out.

• A walk in the woods can be the best time spent while composing 😊

• Music is sound. A score is graphic art. The two are not remotely the same.

• Almost every piece begins with an idea, concept, image, poem, outside of “music.”
CHAPTER 5: AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF MUSIC COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

This chapter presents an integrated model of music composition pedagogy. It provides an overview and analysis of the answers to each of the questions in Chapter 4, as well as perspectives from other resources and my own views. The model outlined below presents an inclusive comparative discussion of the different views so as to highlight both distinct and common ideas.

1. **What pedagogical strategies are most likely to help composition students?**

   One of the best pedagogical strategies for teaching composition is the study of works by past and present distinguished composers. This strategy is the most fundamental element of the teaching philosophy of Dr. Constantinides. Dr. Jacobs says that this strategy includes a wide variety of works as well as specific works to target particular skills. Dr. Beck believes that the practice of modeling a work of the past results in the student’s ability to build his/her own models and eventually his/her own musical language.

   The importance of receiving feedback from peers and performers is mentioned extensively as well. Dr. Jacobs believes that feedback helps students develop their musical languages and find their places in the composition community. Dr. Gibson explains that the collaboration with performers is one of the most effective strategies for helping students learn and develop compositional skills. Dr. Perry extends this point of view, referring to his teacher Morton Subotnick, who stated that a composer should “have three little people inside his head at all times”—the composer, the performer, and the audience. The performer and audience provide feedback and unite with the composer to create a successful work.

   Other effective strategies for helping composition students includes that suggested by Dr. Rudy, who asks students a great number of questions to get an idea of what they look for. He
adds that he likes to concentrate on the materials present in a composition rather than those absent. Dr. Mobberley says that he has been reconsidering his teaching over the years to adjust it to students with various backgrounds and skills. His overall method includes the review and discussion of several representative works of each student at the beginning of a course, the alternation of private and group lessons, the overview and analysis of the current works of students, and referrals to courses outside composition including theory, orchestration, etc., if needed. Furthermore, Dr. Freund mentions practice with limited materials, pre-compositional organization, and multiple solutions and choices as the most significant pedagogical strategies for teaching composition.

2. What are the points that you selectively focus on (or are particularly important to you) in the first few sessions of a composition course?

Almost all of the professors pointed out that they devote the first few composition lessons to learning about the students’ backgrounds and interests. Once they have that preliminary information, they know the specific needs of each student and move forward with compositional strategies and exercises. They believe that to acquire an accurate assessment of students’ backgrounds, it is important to keep in mind that each student is an individual with a diverse set of thoughts and skills. Dr. Mobberley says that there should be no expectations regarding the students’ knowledge in the first few lessons and that the instructor must begin where the students are. Dr. Perry adds that students are not “vessel[s] into which you pour knowledge”; rather, it is necessary to clearly know the students’ needs and goals. Dr. Gibson mentions that one of the first questions that she asks her students is “what are five pieces that you're listening to right now that

58 Dr. Freund in his article “Guiding Young Composers,” Philosophy of Music Education Review 19, no. 1 (2011): 67–79, extensively discusses these three steps as divisions of a compositional process.
you like and why?” This question helps her gain a sense of the students’ preferences that eventually enables her to determine if each student uses more head or heart, or is more logical or emotional. Dr. Beck says that he always wants to learn about the students’ spaces, exposing them to “unfamiliar” or even “uncomfortable” spaces to help them look at their own spaces more thoroughly and develop them.

Regarding the first few lessons, the following exercises are suggested:

- Dr. Constantinides mentions motivic variation as the most constructive exercise to practice from the very beginning. He says that (almost all) great composers present a motive at the beginning and expand it during the course of the piece.

- Dr. Freund suggests exercises with single lines (to help students learn about phrases), exercises in speed-writing, and listening to unfamiliar works.

- Dr. Perry refers to species counterpoint as well as composition for single-line instruments with only one note. He believes that it is particularly challenging to showcase the compositional elements such as contrast, form, etc. with such limited resources. This view is the same as the one that Dr. Freund has extensively discussed in his article under Defining the Materials and Limits (see footnote 55).

Other perspectives on this question include Dr. Gibson’s view that the performance of a piece should be considered from the very beginning and that her job is complete only when the students’ works are fulfilled in performances. Dr. Rudy says that he wants students to know his preferences and values at the beginning so they are able to follow his suggestions. Dr. Mobberley, however, believes that no preferences should be transferred to the students so as not to affect their musical languages and styles.
3. What are some of your thoughts in teaching the concepts of melody, harmony, counterpoint, timbre, texture, rhythm, or any other compositional concepts?

Both particular and general views were given to address this question. Regarding general views, Dr. Constantinides and Dr. Mobberley say that these parameters should be learned in depth in courses outside of composition, for example, in theory courses, and then practiced in the composition course. Dr. Rudy says that the instruction of these parameters within the context of the students’ works is necessary and enables him to refer to examples in the works of other composers.

Dr. Gibson says that students need to identify and map out a piece featuring these parameters from the beginning. However, she acknowledges that this process is not linear and that different students explore these parameters at various points during their composition course. Dr. Beck adds that, depending on the status and progress of the students, he brings different parameters to their attention. He gives as an example the composition of a string quartet by one of his students and his guidance throughout the process to introduce different parameters and ask the student to explore them.

Dr. Jacobs believes that each of these parameters is important and must be practiced in a few exercises to enable students to fully understand the contribution of each to the piece. Also, Dr. Freund proposes a series of etudes featuring these parameters in practice. An example is provided in his Text Setting Etude, which provides instructions and suggests possibilities for composing a vocal line:

Set the words have chosen for you[r] song three different times with three different melodic lines (vocal line only).

Try to explore very different approaches as follows:

Use different tempos, meters, and a contrast of jagged versus smooth rhythms.

Vary the pitch style from modal to mixing modes and chromaticism.
Try different approaches to contour, varying between conjunct and disjunct. If one of your versions starts low and goes higher, try one that starts high.

You should use different approaches to using rests and repetitions of text.

Regarding particular perspectives and exercises on these parameters, Dr. Perry thinks that counterpoint, the basis of his theory and composition pedagogy, is very important. He says that counterpoint (and particularly species counterpoint) is the key to learning about other parameters, including melody, rhythm, form, etc.

Dr. Constantinides also thinks that counterpoint is very important, mostly “when it highlights the rhythm.” Furthermore, he believes that a “nice harmony” needs to be developed in the same way that a good melody is (motivic variation). He also emphasizes that it is important to change the timbre and to consider both the horizontal and vertical aspects of music (as masterfully shown in the works of Richard Strauss, especially Don Juan).

Dr. Beck mentions that he asks his students to look at Webern’s Klangfarbenmelodie (see footnote 40) because it includes all of these parameters. He also suggests exercises, particularly for rhythm (reflecting the techniques of the past including Renaissance motets), that will broaden students’ perspectives of not only rhythm, but also other parameters.

4. **How your approach differs when working with undergraduate students compared to graduate students or in private lessons versus group lessons?**

Almost all of the professors believe that there is no such difference when working with undergraduate versus graduate students, and that it is important to work with each student as an individual regardless of level. The only difference is that graduate students are generally more mature, have a more comprehensive background, know their needs and goals more clearly, and, therefore, require more to satisfy their expectations. However, there are undergraduate students who are exceptions and who are more motivated and musically literate than graduate students. Undergraduate students, on the other hand, have more varied backgrounds and need more step-
by-step guidance to help them find their own voices. In addition, Dr. Freund notes that “undergrads generally work better with smaller works in terms of length and ensemble size.” Dr. Perry thinks that the “gaps in historical knowledge” of the undergraduate students must be filled in, and Dr. Gibson mentions that “undergraduates [must] learn very early on that they need to be active in seeking out performers.”

Regarding private versus group lessons, several interesting perspectives were addressed, as summarized below:

- Dr. Beck says that “Group lessons are far more effective, especially at the undergraduate level,” while private lessons provide the teacher with an opportunity to “penetrate into the [student’s] piece in a very specific moment-by-moment way that you [the teacher] can’t do in a group lesson—a level of communication that you [the teacher] develop with the students that can be very personal.”

- Dr. Freund says, “For group lessons, limited etudes where all are addressing the same issues are most productive.” Dr. Jacobs adds that “the most fruitful element of class composition is the common assignment. By all having to face a problem (really, just about any assignment), they really come to appreciate the varying approaches taken by their colleagues. Class assignments always lead to more open ears, more appreciation for varying perspectives, and the broadening sense of possible solutions to problems.” He continues, “Classes are a good forum for talking about what we all share as composers, the difficulties of making decisions, taking chances, etc.”

- Dr. Mobberley says that “Developing good interactivity skills in group lessons is more fundamental in undergraduate groups, though occasionally we spend time on this in graduate groups, especially when discussing composition pedagogy.”
5. To compose a new work, do you normally give students some initial ideas or do you believe that they should generate the original material without your help? (How does the process of composing a new work happen to your students?)

The common perspective is that almost all students come up with initial ideas and the teacher’s responsibility is to help them develop those ideas. Dr. Perry explains in detail that “ideas aren't the problem. It's presenting them, implementing them, developing them, and packaging them that's the problem” and that a teacher must “help a student interrogate their initial idea and figure out what it requires in terms of going somewhere and continuing.”

Dr. Jacobs says that he provides initial ideas only in the earliest lessons/exercises of a composition course. Also, Dr. Beck says that he mostly provides new or less self-motivated students with the initial parameters to get them started and pointed in a creative direction. Those parameters include instrumentation, length, form, etc., but not specific melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic materials. He adds that the key reason is to help the students “come up with their own solutions to the blank page” and pass through the syndrome/terror of the blank page. “I find that once students get into this rhythm, they're able to do those kinds of pre-compositional strategies on their own and they don't necessarily need my assistance unless I have a specific objective that I want them to work with,” he continues. Dr. Rudy says that if his students do not have initial ideas, he would suggest them take inspiration from “something that is going on in their lives.”

Dr. Mobberley believes that the composition process, or whether or not he gives the students initial ideas, “varies greatly from student to student,” and he chooses whatever method most successfully helps his students be creative. Dr. Gibson agrees with Dr. Mobberley, saying that “again, it goes back to the head or heart.”

Dr. Constantinides believes that the one thing that should be avoided in any method is students copying their teacher. “They have to find their own voice” and “this should start from the very beginning”, he says.
6. What composers or works do you frequently refer to in your composition lessons?


Regarding specific composers or works, Dr. Jacobs mentions “Berio Sequenzas; Brahms symphonies; Beethoven late quartets; Palestrina Masses; Debussy’s preludes and orch works; Copland Piano Variations (and Orchestra Variations); Abrahamsen’s Schnee; Davies’ Eight Songs for a Mad King; Ligeti’s piano etudes; Kurtag song fragment cycles; George Benjamin’s Written On Skin.”

Dr. Perry refers to Bartok’s Mikrokosmos, which were specifically composed as pedagogical works for both pianists and composers; art songs of various eras and composers, which provide excellent examples of the skillful use of musical elements in a short piece; and Haydn’s chamber works, which are easy to examine and get ideas from.

Dr. Mobberley believes that “it’s so difficult to find works that relate very directly to the specific piece being written and the specific issues that have arisen,” so he does not refer to other works very often. He provides several examples of composition issues and the composers/works he addresses: “brass writing: Donald Erb’s Brass Concerto; speech-rhythm vs. non-speech rhythm in choral music: Stravinsky’s Symphony of Psalms; mingling more-harmonically based materials with less-harmonically based materials: Joseph Schwantner’s And the Mountains Rising Nowhere.” He also says that he may refer to one of his own works for a very specific
issue such as “using both metric and non-metric notation in a single piece” or “placing cues and timings in scores for instrument and fixed media playback.”

Dr. Beck mentions Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7* and Debussy’s *La Mer* as examples of helpful works. He continues that it is important to refer to works that provide the students with an understanding of the language that they are interested in.

Also, Dr. Gibson mentions that she suggests that students review works by Pulitzer prize-winning composers over the last 50 years to help them learn about current composers.

7. **What are your proposed instruments/ensembles for which students should compose during the undergraduate or graduate studies?**

The common perspective is that it depends on the students’ interests and skills as well as on performance opportunities. However, the professors recommend starting with solo, duo, and small-scale ensembles, then expanding the portfolio to include larger ensembles and orchestra, so that students eventually experience all instruments and ensembles. Experience with composing for solo instruments is particularly encouraged because it helps students learn the specifics of each instrument and compositional elements/techniques simultaneously. Also, vocal and choral music is recommended to help the students “learn how to set a text and how to relate music to words,” as Dr. Perry says. Moreover, it is strongly stressed that the students collaborate with performers and ensembles as much as possible to hear their works and receive feedback.

The undergraduate students should compose for standard small-scale ensembles such as the string quartet, woodwind quintet, and brass quintet and graduate students, for at least one large-scale/orchestral work. Dr. Constantinides particularly highlights the string quartet as “the most complete ensemble of all times.” Dr. Mobberley explains the requirements for both undergraduate and graduate students below:

We typically require that undergraduate students compose for at least four of six possible instruments/ensembles during their degrees: chamber music, choral &
vocal, electronic & computer, orchestra and/or wind ensemble, ethnic instruments. For graduate students, we look at their history and recommend filling in any gaps. Doctoral students may elect to focus more specifically on one or more genres if they have covered most or all of the bases in their earlier degrees.

8. **How do you split a composition lesson into different activities?**

The agenda varies depending on whether it is a private or group lesson. Private lessons mostly include a review of the student’s work(s) to discuss problems or concerns and suggest solutions for improvement, as well as listening to representative works addressing the same issues. Dr. Gibson emphasizes that it is important to keep a balance between different activities and mentions improvisation and sonic imagination as examples of creative activities in a composition lesson.

Group lessons should include more activities and a fixed schedule. Dr. Rudy says that one of the activities that he does in his classes for sophomores is to discuss their daily composition schedule to “help them see and begin to understand what works for them, and when they tend to succeed at sitting down to compose.”

Dr. Jacobs highlights the details of different activities in a composition lesson below:

Lessons usually begin with the student reviewing their notes on the week’s listening/score study assignment. We might listen to a particular moment, or address questions in the score re orchestration, notation, harmony, etc., before I’ll ask what they might imagine stealing from this piece/composer.

We shift to what the student’s writing, and I read it through. I ask them what specific questions/moments/concerns they have, and we address those first.

I then put the work in the context of the larger, ongoing piece, leading to discussions/comments re formal design, proportion, contrast, etc.

There’s usually a moment during which we address something about notation, perhaps consulting a reference (Gould’s *Behind Bars*).

A listening assignment usually closes a lesson, with a few specific questions relating something about the assigned piece and an issue they’re facing in their current project.
9. **How do you include listening and analysis assignments in each composition session (or in a composition course, in general)?**

   A portion of a composition lesson is usually devoted to listening and analysis assignments. Some of the perspectives on this question are highlighted below:

   Dr. Constantinides says that he spends almost half of a lesson on listening and analysis assignments. He believes that such activity may be practiced in a course entitled “Score Reading”, to be held once a week “for composers of all levels.”

   Dr. Freund remarks that “I ask students to bring a score to every lesson, and spend 5–10 minutes applying lessons from the score to the student’s current work.”

   Dr. Perry mentions that his listening/analysis of the core repertoire includes works by Igor Stravinsky, the Second Viennese School, Bela Bartok, Ruth Crawford, and Charles Ives (featuring a series of problems as much as series of solutions).

   Dr. Beck says that he particularly does formal analysis if he wants to “introduce a student to a new approach or a new set of ideas that are exemplified by a particular piece or a couple of pieces.”

   Dr. Gibson mentions that as a requirement for a group lesson, she asks her students to “analyze a piece over the course of the semester, not as a theorist but as a composer, and really dig into a piece that excites them.”

   Dr. Mobberley says that he entirely reserves the time in a composition lesson to focus on the current work of a student. Lab sessions are provided for freshmen and sophomores to listen to and analyze the core repertoire and practice notation and orchestration. Weekly forums are held for juniors, seniors, and graduate students to learn about various topics from guest artists.
10. **What are your criteria in evaluating a student’s work in each session (or in a composition course, in general)?**

As Dr. Mobberley states, evaluation is one of the challenging aspects of teaching a creative disciplines and must be individualized. The common perspective held by all of the professors is that progress and engagement on an individual basis is the key to a successful evaluation. This includes the students’ active involvement in activities and assignments as well as creative and thoughtful development in their weekly lessons.

Dr. Rudy mentions that he considers two grades in each lesson. One is a self-assessment grade that a student award his/herself and the other is the grade that he as the teacher assigns the student. He says that this approach helps him keep track of the process and determine “a grade at the end of the semester, as opposed to just subjectively basing the grade on the finished product.” He also says that he types his comments into Canvas during a lesson to provide a reminder of the lesson material to both himself and the students.

Dr. Jacobs remarks that “work ethic, consistency of work,” and students’ thoughtfulness about their works and critiques as well as their interest to “stretch themselves, to try new things, to evaluate the limitations of their habitual tendencies” are his concerns in an evaluation.

Dr. Constantinides says that he considers “80% of the grade for ten minutes of quality music including lesson attendance, 10% for concert reports and assignments, and 10% for Composers Forum attendance.” He adds that a great use of register and both the horizontal and vertical aspects of a composition are the criteria he uses for the technical evaluation of a student’s work.

11. **What are the things you consider in giving effective feedback to students?**

A general point of view is that effective feedback must be responsive to the students’ issues, concerns, and problems. Dr. Perry and Dr. Gibson refer to composition lessons as therapy
sessions and believe that the student-teacher dialogue in private lessons may become very personal and emotionally intense. Dr. Perry continues, “sometimes, the right comment at the wrong time can be as discouraging and damaging as the wrong comment at the right time.”

Dr. Jacobs mentions that it is important to provide students with constructive rather than commentary critique so they can internalize it to help them grow their skills. He adds that he asks his students to repeat his comment and interpret it, explaining how it can help them generate new ideas and further progress.

Dr. Beck emphasizes that self-criticism is very effective in any discipline, particularly composition. He says that he does not normally give direct feedback to students on what to do, but rather suggests ideas to guide the students to understand and explore possibilities.

Dr. Gibson emphasizes that the “the more levels that feedback can occur, the more beneficial.” She believes that the feedback should not necessarily come from the teacher to the student; feedback from mentors, performers, and peers is as helpful as feedback from the teacher. She adds that the students also need to learn “how to manage the negative feedback” because it happens in the professional world of music very frequently.

Dr. Rudy believes that the most effective feedback occurs when the teacher focuses on the student’s current work. He continues that “there are always seeds of the student’s expansion already nested in their work. I look for those seeds, and together we water and nurture them into more mature ideas.”

12. How often do you provide feedback to students and how does it enhance students’ productivity?

The common view is that feedback is provided as often as possible but normally on a weekly basis. Dr. Perry says that it depends on the individual students and projects. Sometimes he gives feedback along the way as he listens to a little bit of a work, while other times he gives
“an overall perspective” after listening to a great portion of a work. Dr. Jacobs mentions that not only does he provide “extensive feedback on the micro and macro perspective of their work, both conceptually and technically” in every lesson, but also regularly asks for the students’ feedback about their music and the music of their colleagues featured at a concert or reading session. Dr. Mobberley believes that feedback must address “the nature of the student’s individual creative process” as well as his/her current work. “Roadblocks to progress are many, and can become detrimental if left unexplored and [un]discussed,” he continues.

It is challenging to address how feedback enhances productivity. Dr. Beck believes that productivity is self-generated and that there is not much that a teacher can do to enhance it unless the “lack of productivity is because of a conceptual problem” that can be addressed by the teacher. Dr. Gibson also believes that the pace of productivity varies for different students and that one thing to improve it is “seeing the project through,” not just “writing the project.” Dr. Rudy remarks that “the best way to enhance the students’ productivity, is to help them get to know their process and what works for them!”

**13. What are your specific considerations to boost students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking?**

This question provoked a broad range of perspectives. Dr. Beck believes that creativity cannot be taught, but can be reinforced by learning, developing, and using the tool sets. Dr. Freund says that to enhance the students’ engagement in the process of creative thinking, it is important that the teacher “demonstrate an honest enthusiasm for the students’ ideas and goals.” Dr. Rudy says that generating ideas is a very helpful practice and that “assumptions and judgments are creativity killers” that should be avoided at any level. Dr. Mobberley explains in an example that students need to be guided toward creative thinking by exploring possibilities. Drs. Perry, Jacobs, and Constantinides refer to participation in concerts, engagement with peers,
collaboration with performers and artists of other media such as literature, film, drama, visual arts, and dance as examples of other considerations to enhance creative thinking.

14. What is the most challenging aspect of teaching composition?

The common point of view is that it is very challenging, as well as rewarding, to lead students to find their own voices. The quotations below explain this perspective:

• “Set my own background aside and realize that I'm not training them to be another me, that I'm training them to be the best composer they can be.” (Dr. Perry)

• “Keeping my own preferences out of the way. What I like and dislike is irrelevant to a student’s work.” (Dr. Rudy)

• “Leading students to evaluate their own decisions and decision-making processes.” (Dr. Jacobs)

• “Cultivating the student’s voice and not my own” and “not making aesthetic judgments based on my own aesthetics but rather helping them make their own decisions about what's working and what's not working and why it's working or not working.” (Dr. Beck)

• “Helping students create the piece that truly reflects what they are experiencing in their ears, and opening doors of possibility that help them achieve this.” (Dr. Mobberley)

Dr. Mobberley believes that “the learning process in the creative arts makes use of required skills, but the result is never pre-determined. There are no right answers, only different options.” The same perspective is advocated by Drs. Rudy and Beck. Dr. Rudy says “I NEVER evaluate something as good or bad. I work really hard to keep judgment out of the conversation. Instead, I focus on helping the student[s] clarify what they want to do. We always work on preferences, not judgements.” Dr. Beck also accents that it is important to “communicate to
students the idea that the best, or the perfect, cannot be the enemy of the good. Just because something's not perfect, doesn't mean it's not ready to be discussed.”

Of the other perspectives concerning the most challenging aspect of teaching composition, Dr. Freund mentions determining the specific agenda for every lesson. Also, Dr. Gibson refers to mentorship and guiding students to take input from teachers and peers. Dr. Constantinides brings up the idea that a true love for music and pedagogy helps a teacher overcome the challenges.

15. What are some highlights of your composition methodology?

This question was intended to act as a platform for the professors to discuss their own composition methodologies and/or add anything not already mentioned. The answers present a wide range of perspectives that are very interesting, helpful, and perhaps personal. Each answer highlights an individual creative methodology; therefore, I encourage the reader to study the entire text of the answers to this question to learn about the various views.

According to the most common views among the entirety of the answers, a composition teacher would:

- Constantly modify his/her teaching to suit students of different backgrounds, skills, etc.
- Not impose his/her musical language on students. Instead, introduce the students to a great number of styles and genres to learn and get inspired.
- Help the students go beyond the MIDI sounds and encourage them to listen to live performances of their works. Listening to audio files from notation software such as Finale or Sibelius should never replace listening to live performances.
- Provide students with creative collaborative opportunities with peers and performers.
• Continually refresh his/her knowledge and update pedagogical methods based on his/her own experience and past and current resources rather than simply the rules of the textbooks.

The following is a list of other interesting perspectives in music composition pedagogy that have been discussed in the literature and are suggested as components of the integrated model presented in this chapter.

• Ward-Steinman believes that “the key to valid criticism is contextuality, not the imposition of a priori theories, notions, or styles.”59 This key is important for all disciplines, particularly the creative disciplines such as music composition.

• It is recommended that the students study with several composition professors during their degree, if possible. An example is provided by the composition majors at Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, who “are advised to study with different teachers each year, guaranteeing a diversity of viewpoints.”60

• Regarding the diversity of styles that should be considered in a composition curriculum, Robert C. Ehle thinks that “the best music composed in our time will be in response to a mixture of … trends or models.”61 Harris believes that style and technique are different and only technique can be taught. “… I can comment on a student's technique and whether or not it seems to be stylistically consistent or relevant to the intention of a proposed piece. I can only give personal opinions on the stylistic relevance. I will try to


61 Ehle, “Models for Young Composers,” 33.
point out areas in which a student's gifts seem to lie, and this may be of some help in determining questions of style.”

- Writer's block is defined as “an inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment” and can occur for composers at all levels for a variety of reasons. According to Ward-Steinman, ideas for avoiding writer's block include to compose regularly, to compose a short yet complete piece every day, and to “work on another part of the piece or even another piece entirely for a while.” He also mentions that “music does not have to be composed straight through from beginning to end … you can start anywhere and decide later where things go best” and recommends that composition students “put composition first every day when their energy is highest.”

- Tom Baker believes that “composition pedagogy, where the focus is not only skill acquisition, but also solving design problems, might benefit through the exploration of alternative approaches.” In his article The Composers' Studio: An Alternative Model, he proposes an interesting pedagogical model inspired by a curriculum known as Architecture Studio in an architecture program.


63 Equivalent to “the terror of the blank page” that Dr. Beck mentioned.


I believe that a music composition lesson should uncover pathways and ideas that students can pursue further during their careers. Students cannot acquire skills and knowledge if taught only rules and guidelines. It is important to help the students explore possibilities that could be used in a broad range of circumstances. To achieve this goal, a curriculum for music composition should incorporate various musical activities. Students should be encouraged to expand their knowledge by participating in collaborative projects with peers and performers and attending rehearsals and concerts as often as possible. Most importantly, students should experience live performances of their music in concerts or workshops by peers and professionals.

The analysis of works of great composers and the overview of students’ works and exercises are two recommended activities in a music composition lesson. The first activity provides the teacher with an opportunity to pass on the techniques of great masters and help the students learn about repertoire and compositional models. The second part allows the teacher to transfer perspectives and strategies to help the students improve their works. Overall, it is necessary to assist the students to obtain a comprehensive understanding of styles and genres as well as provide them with the tools and techniques to develop their works.
APPENDIX

Date: June 11, 2020

To: Malcolm Richardson
   Interim Dean, Graduate School

Through: Stephen Beck
         Associate Vice President, ORED

Re: Unapproved Project

The IRB office was notified by a PhD candidate (Niloufar Iravani, Music, major professor: Dr. Dinos Constantinides) that her dissertation research, which involved human subjects was not properly submitted to the IRB for review. The project involved interviewing college professors about their teaching perspectives. This information was audio recorded and transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. Generally, projects of this kind qualify for approval through the exemption process since the risk level is minimal. However, a risk level determination is not possible at this point for this dissertation. Therefore, this project will be recorded in IRB files as unapproved with a non-determined risk level.

Thank you,

Alex Cohen
Professor, Psychology
Chair, Institutional Review Board

cc: Elizabeth Cadarette
    Dinos Constantinides
    Niloufar Iravani

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VITA

Niloufar Iravani has been selected as the 2019 Louisiana Music Teacher Association (LMTA) Commissioned Composer, first prize winner of the Southeastern Composers League’s (SCL) 2018 Philip Slates Memorial Competition, and third prize winner of the 2020 Darkwater Women in Music Festival Composition Competition. In addition to being selected in the American Composers Orchestra (ACO) EarShot 2018 Readings, she was a finalist in the fifth annual Smackdown String Quartet and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) Foundation’s 2018 Morton Gould Young Composer Awards.

Iravani has received commissions from acclaimed musicians, ensembles, and associations, and several of her works are published by Conners Publications. She has served as an adjudicator for the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States (SEAMUS) National Conference and as a reviewer for the International Computer Music Conference (ICMC).

Iravani’s music has been performed at distinguished venues by well-known soloists and ensembles, including the Constanta Symphony Orchestra, Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, Louisiana Sinfonietta, and Invoke String Quartet. Her works have also been presented at prominent festivals and conferences such as the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States (SEAMUS) 2018 National Conference, 2017 University of Tennessee Contemporary Music Festival, Cube Festival 2018, and the 2nd and 3rd Music by Women Festivals.

Iravani received a B.A. in Piano Performance and M.A. in Music Composition from the University of Tehran, Iran, and an M.M. in Music Composition from Louisiana State University (LSU), USA. She is currently completing her doctoral studies under the supervision of Dr. Dinos Constantinides and serving as a graduate assistant at LSU.