

Undergraduate Research and Affective Learning: Examining a Contemporary Music Research Project

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Introduction

In this article, I will describe and discuss a specific research project that I have assigned in my Music History III (1900-present) class for a number of years. Although the details of this project are uniquely tailored to the music history classroom, its basic idea—to have students interview a living artist and analyze one of her works—can be applied to all creative fields. In assessing the success of the project, I have chosen to investigate its impact on my students' affective engagement with contemporary music. At the same time, I have observed a variety of additional benefits, which I will outline below.

This research project for undergraduate music students was born out of a frustration shared by history educators in all disciplines: how do you teach recent history? In the 2012 volume *Doing Recent History*, a number of historians reflect on the benefits and challenges of documenting ongoing events. Renee C. Romano identifies “four specific methodological or practical challenges that many historians of the recent past must grapple with and view as productive, if vexing, aspects of our craft.”¹ These include the paucity of sources of the type that have traditionally been considered necessary for scholarly work in the discipline; a shortage of secondary literature; the impossibility of constructing a closed historical narrative; and the blinders that come with being too close—politically, emotionally, and temporally—to the events under investigation. Shelley Sang-Hee Lee reaches the same conclusions when she reflects on the unique pedagogical situation that arises when students read about and discuss historical events that have taken place within living memory. She and her students agree that their closeness to the events in question both denies them knowledge of long-term effects and provokes emotional responses that

1. Renee C. Romano, “Not Dead Yet: My Identity Crisis as a Historian of the Recent Past,” in *Doing Recent History*, ed. Claire Bond Potter and Renee C. Romano (Athens: UGA Press, 2012), 24.

don't often arise in the study of the distant past. "My students and I often feel like actors working without a script," writes Lee, "daunted by the lack of guiding materials but excited by the possibilities of what the journey may uncover."²

Our closeness to recent history means that we cannot understand it in the same way that we understand the distant past. As composer Christopher Fox so evocatively puts it, "If histories are like great rivers, then their account of the recent past is the point where they run out into the sea in a complex, spreading delta. The landscape is flat, its features indistinct, making navigation an uncertain art."³ The task of guiding newcomers through this landscape presents a unique pedagogical challenge, for educators and student alike must develop new frameworks for creating and assimilating knowledge. In most cases, students have been learning about historical developments and players in terms of perceived long-term significance.⁴ In a music history class, for example, students have probably been studying composers whose innovations impacted generations of artists to follow (like Arnold Schoenberg) and stylistic movements that proved both transformative and influential (like minimalism). Even if the instructor fights the implication that history is about progress, it doesn't change that fact that we most often teach about the creators and works that steered the course of artistic expression—part of what Robin Elliott has described as "the contemporary musicologist's dilemma."⁵ Where recent artistic activity is concerned, however, it is impossible to say which voices are going to become influential, or which trends are going to have a broad impact. The editors of *Doing Recent History* acknowledge this with the words of renowned historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., who observed that scholars must acknowledge the "inadequacy of the present moment for any sort of lasting judgments."⁶

How, then, do we make sense of the composers, styles, and creative products of today? The narrative of influence crumbles, and we must provide a new critical lens. At the same time, our nearness to recent history provides countless

2. Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, "Working without a Script: Reflections on Teaching Recent American History," in *Doing Recent History*, ed. Claire Bond Potter and Renee C. Romano (Athens: UGA Press, 2012), 46.

3. Christopher Fox, "Past Imperative," review of *The Oxford History of Western Music, Volume 5: The Late Twentieth Century*, by Richard Taruskin, *The Musical Times* 146 (2005): 104.

4. Christopher H. Gibbs, "Introduction: Reading Music," in *The Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition*, by Richard Taruskin and Christopher H. Gibbs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), xxx.

5. See Matthew Baumer, "A Snapshot of Music History Teaching to Undergraduate Music Majors, 2011–2012: Curricula, Methods, Assessment, and Objectives," this *Journal* 5/2 (2015): 40; and Robin Elliot, review of *The Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition*, by Richard Taruskin and Christopher H. Gibbs, this *Journal* 3/2 (Spring, 2013): 199.

6. Renee C. Romano and C. B. Potter, "Just over Our Shoulder: The Pleasures and Perils of Writing the Recent Past," in *Doing Recent History*, ed. Claire Bond Potter and Renee C. Romano (Athens: UGA Press, 2012), 2.

opportunities that are not otherwise available. Documentation is abundant and easy to access; primary sources are a click away; events can be experienced first-hand; and the history makers themselves can be queried.⁷ All of these resources can be brought into the history curriculum to facilitate a vibrant encounter between students and their own historical moment. By engaging with these resources and documenting their experience, students in turn become historians. They are empowered to make meaningful contributions to the historical record on a level that usually cannot be achieved without training and resources that are seldom available to undergraduates.⁸

Undergraduate research has increasingly been recognized as a “high-impact” practice: a pedagogical tool that can offer extensive returns in terms of student learning, engagement, and performance.⁹ Unfortunately, undergraduates in the humanities have fewer opportunities to engage in original research than their counterparts in the sciences. This seems to be due to the more collaborative nature of scientific research, which often makes it possible for professors to involve students in their own work. Humanities students, on the other hand, might receive a college degree without having ventured beyond the investigative bounds of a derivative research paper. The proceedings of the 2017 National Conference for Undergraduate Research stand as evidence: biology, experimental psychology, and chemistry boast the largest number of student presenters. The humanities are well represented, with English as the strongest contender, but the numbers suggest a significant imbalance.¹⁰ Per F. Broman made a plea for undergraduate research in music history, or “musicology making,” back in 2010. This was the only pedagogical approach, in his view, that would serve “to develop both an appreciation of the musical material and an appreciation of the musicological methods.”¹¹

The decision to use undergraduate research in the humanities classroom also invites the design of writing-intensive courses—another recognized high-impact practice.¹² The research process often incorporates a variety of writing styles and techniques. The researcher might craft proposals, outlines, summaries, transcriptions, progress reports, blog posts, conference papers, or

7. Appelrouth, Scott, “Breathing Life into Texts: Using Interviews to Make Real World Connections,” *College Teaching* 49 (2001): 134.

8. *Ibid.*, 135.

9. George D. Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They are, Who has Access to them, and why they Matter* (Washington: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008), 10.

10. “NCUR Abstract Acceptance by Subject,” Council on Undergraduate Research, accessed March 14, 2017, https://www.cur.org/ncur_2017/account/?search=true.

11. Per F. Broman, “The Good, the True, and the Professional: Teaching Music History in an Age of Excess,” in *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2010).

12. Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices*, 10.

article drafts. These modes of writing address a variety of audiences (oneself, the public, non-specialists, colleagues, assessment committees, etc.) and play different roles in the cultivation of a well-developed and clearly articulated thesis. A selection of these writing activities, accompanied by clear instructions and prompt feedback, can be translated into the curriculum and used to support an undergraduate research project. Doing so provides students with an opportunity to expand their comfort as writers and to practice writing as a mode of thinking. Douglass Seaton has urged others in the field to “use writing as a way of helping students to be more adventurous in exploring ideas.”¹³ The instructor in this scenario is responsible for providing frequent and detailed feedback, as advocated for by Seaton, Kuh, and Carol A. Hess.¹⁴ This means that students must submit written products on a regular schedule, and the instructor must “fill their margins with questions and thoughts.”¹⁵

Context for the Case Study

I conduct this particular research project with my Music History III class at a small, rural four-year institution. The campus primarily attracts students from a 30-county region that occupies the northeastern corner of Georgia, and the Music Department has about sixty declared majors. These are split between music education (60%) and music (40%), although education majors make up about 70% of the music history class population due to curricular requirements. These classes also enroll a few music minors. The music history classes tend to be small, and class sizes range from about six to fourteen students. The campus does not have a New Music ensemble, a composition program, or a career composer on the faculty, although students can take lessons in composition if they are interested. Opportunities to perform or hear performances of 20th- and 21st-century art music are limited to occasional programming by the University ensembles and some private studios.

My initial inspiration to design this project came from the textbook that I use for my music history classes, which offers a survey of recent musical developments that is overwhelming in its breadth and variety. Like many available texts, the *Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition* concludes with a dizzying survey of significant composers and compositional styles from the last forty years. The coherent trends that shaped previous chapters are gone (Fox

13. Douglass Seaton, “Teaching Music History: Principles, Problems, and Proposals,” in *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2010), 69.

14. Carol A. Hess, “Score and Word: Writing about Music,” in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 200–02.

15. Seaton, “Teaching Music History,” 69.

describes the final chapter as having “no discernable rationale at all”), and in their place students encounter a fragmented kaleidoscope of names and titles.¹⁶ Susan McClary adds that the narrative “leaves one with the distinct impression that Western music has been drained to its very bitter dregs.”¹⁷ At the same time, the final chapter does not (and perhaps cannot) bring students anywhere close to the present day. The youngest of the living composers included in the *Oxford Anthology of Western Music*, Kaija Saariaho, was born in 1952, and her *L'amour de loin* (the only selection in the anthology from later than the 1980s) premiered in 2000. Although I have not conducted a formal survey of my students' responses to Taruskin's *magnum opus*, I have tried to imagine them. It seems to me that they can only conclude that art music today is in complete disarray. While I am sympathetic to the challenges of writing recent music history, I need my students to understand that composition is very much alive and well, and that there are vibrant art music scenes around the world.¹⁸

My research project design is also influenced by my commitment to an affective pedagogical model, as described and advocated for by Robert C. Lagueux.¹⁹ As Matthew Baumer pointed out in his ambitious 2012 study of music history requirements in undergraduate programs, there is no shortage of worthwhile objectives for the music history instructor to pursue. Not every educator considers affective engagement to be an important goal of music history education. Baumer himself did not include “appreciation” as an objective in his study, leading respondents to enter such values as “become a lifelong lover and appreciator of music” by hand.²⁰ I feel strongly that one of my most important tasks as an educator is to impart the ability to enjoy a broad range of music. In *Music History III*, I am particularly concerned with fostering the appreciation of recently-composed works, sometimes of an experimental nature, that are unlikely to achieve permanence in the repertoire. I do not wish to suggest that experimental music is more important than or superior to more mainstream compositional styles (e.g. the choral music of Eric Whitacre or the film scores of John Williams) or to music that has traditionally occupied the popular sphere, nor do I wish to promote a modernist narrative of progress in music. I address these concerns both in the class curriculum and in the selection

16. Fox, “Past Imperative,” 106.

17. Susan McClary, “The World According to Taruskin,” review of *The Oxford History of Western Music*, by Richard Taruskin, *Music and Letters* 87 (2006): 414.

18. For an historiographical account of Richard Taruskin's work in the context of recent-history writing over the past several centuries, see: Mark Everist, “In Search of the Waters of Oblivion,” review of *The Oxford History of Western Music*, by Richard Taruskin, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62 (2009): 702–06.

19. Robert C. Lagueux, “Inverting Bloom's Taxonomy: The Role of Affective Responses in Teaching and Learning,” this *Journal* 3/2 (2013): 119–50, here p. 121.

20. Baumer, “A Snapshot of Music History Teaching to Undergraduate Music Majors,” 45.

of musical examples for the research project, which represent a broad range of philosophies and styles to be detailed below. However, I do wish to expose my students to compositional values and individual works that they might not otherwise encounter. I believe that expanding one's ability to derive meaningful experiences from music is always a worthwhile pursuit, whether that means developing an ear for country blues recordings, playing in a gamelan ensemble, or—the realm I consider most appropriate to the goals and contents of this course—engaging directly with conservatory-trained composers.

Although these constitute my own reasons for designing and implementing this research project, they are not the only valid reasons for assigning a project like this one, nor do they make up an exhaustive list of all of the benefits to be gained. One simple advantage of an original research project is that it allows the instructor to avoid the traditional term paper, which has come under increasing criticism. Instructors have observed time and again that students do not often produce good work in response to a research paper prompt. At the same time, music historians are not always equipped to promote good writing, either because they are not trained in writing pedagogy or because they are overloaded with other kinds of work.²¹ Commentators have concluded that term paper assignments usually fail because students don't have the necessary research skills, are not prepared to engage critically with the material, do not understand the objectives, are not interested in the topic, don't perceive value in the assignment, or simply procrastinate.²² This project is designed to address all of these pitfalls. Considerable class time is dedicated to explaining the task, preparing students to be successful, and connecting the research with the course material. Students select their own subjects, and the assignment itself is laden with progressive deadlines. I have observed that my students produce more polished and interesting work in Music History III than they do in my other classes, enjoy the project more than they do traditional writing assignments, and remember the experience for years afterward.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of this project, however, is the opportunity to introduce diversity into the music history curriculum. Many instructors have struggled with the dominance of white men in the music history narrative.²³

21. Hess, "Score and Word," 193; Scott Warfield, "The Research Paper," in *The Music History Classroom*, ed. James A. Davis (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 125–6; Erinn E. Knyt, "Rethinking the Music History Research Paper Assignment," this *Journal* 4/1 (Fall, 2013): 23–27, here p. 23.

22. Christopher Baker, "A Fresh Attitude for Humanities Research," *College Teaching* 39 (1991): 83; Warfield, "The Research Paper," 125–30; Knyt, "Rethinking the Music History Research Paper Assignment," 23.

23. Melanie Lowe, "Teaching Music History Today: Making Tangible Connections to Here and Now," this *Journal* 1 (2010): 45–59, here p. 54; Susan Cook, "Teaching Others, Others Teaching, or Music History Like it Mattered," in *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2010), 131–33.

Some have employed clever techniques to incorporate the voices of women and minorities, but it is impossible to reverse the fact that only certain members of society have been permitted to succeed as composers and performers of art music for many centuries.²⁴ Because I personally recruit the young composers who participate in my research project, I can ensure that a variety of identities, backgrounds, and ethnicities are represented. Some of the works that my students engage with explicitly address issues of oppression and inequality—a fact that has stimulated fascinating discussion in the classroom. This project also challenges another misconception perpetuated both by the music history curriculum and by contemporary concert culture: that only a few composers in each generation are worth listening to. Upon encountering the diverse and compelling compositional voices that populate their own world, students immediately comprehend that such variety has always been the norm.

The Research Project

For this project, I pair each of my students with a composer and assign a work by that composer for the student to study and analyze. The primary resource for the project is the composer, who completes an interview with the student and supplies any additional materials that might be of use. Because these interviews constitute single subject studies and do not seek to produce generalizable knowledge, students do not require institutional review board (IRB) clearance to conduct research with human subjects. In addition to the interview, students are expected to complete additional research on the composer, read concert and recording reviews, listen to companion works, and gather relevant contextual information from the secondary literature. The final product is a twenty-minute conference-style presentation at the Research on Contemporary Composition (ROCC) Conference, which is a public event that I facilitate at the end of the semester.²⁵

The first step in my project each year is to recruit composers who are willing to submit one or more pieces for use in the project and then to complete an interview with a student. Some of the participants are friends, colleagues, or former classmates of mine, while others were referred to me by performers who specialize in contemporary music. I have made an effort to recruit non-male and non-white composers, but I have not found the need to actively pursue

24. Kira Thurman and Kristen Turner, “Six Easy Ways to Immediately Address Racial and Gender Diversity in Your Music History Classroom,” *Musicology Now* (blog), American Musicological Society, July 17, 2017, <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2017/07/six-easy-ways-to-immediately-address.html>.

25. This event has undergone a change in form and name almost every year as I experiment with new modes of presentation. I will refer to it by its current name throughout this article.

diversity in compositional styles. Instead, the composers have brought broad stylistic representation to the project without any additional curatorial work on my part. The examples I am able to offer my students range from neo-Romantic (Colin Britt, *House of Clouds*) to postminimalist (Scott Ordway, *Tonight We Tell the Secrets of the World*) to experimental (Tawnie Olson, *Something to Say*), to postmodern (Ted Hearne, *The Law of Mosaics*), and might be categorized as traditional concert pieces (Max Grafe, *Bismuth*), sound art (Kala Pierson, *Shahida*), or performance art (Elizabeth Baker, *meditation for water, wind, and metal*). Some of the participants have been able to share videos, inspirational materials, or compositional sketches, all of which add interesting dimensions to the project. Most of the composers have been excited to participate in the project, and they have all enjoyed the experience. Additionally, the composers benefit both by winning new fans of their work (more below) and securing publicity in the form of conference presentations, which have taken place both on campus and at the National Conference for Undergraduate Research. There is also the possibility that the work in question will be programmed for performance as part of the ROCC Conference.

On the first day of class I make it clear that this research project is a major, ongoing component of the course, and I explain its purpose and procedures. In his discussion of the music history research paper, Scott Warfield warns that “what might seem obvious to an instructor about an assignment will need to be stated explicitly, and often repeatedly, to undergraduate students”—an observation that has been borne out by my experience.²⁶ For this project, I provide my students with a detailed, eight-step assignment sheet complete with progressive deadlines. For the first assignment, each student listens to all of the works available for the project and writes personal responses to three that he finds interesting. In this way, I hope both to pair students with works they will enjoy and to set them on a path to making a real connection with the music, aided by conversation with its creator. I have been pleased by the variety of responses that I have received to the initial listening assignment. It has not been difficult to distribute the selections satisfactorily, and they usually all attract interest from at least one student. I let students know which piece/composer they have been assigned almost immediately after the reflections are due.

The next task is to prepare for the interview with the composer. This is accomplished both in class and independently. First, I talk students through the techniques and etiquette of conducting and recording an interview via phone or Skype. I emphasize the importance of having done the background research and being prepared with a thorough list of potential questions, although I also encourage them to let the composer take the conversation in new directions. I

26. Warfield, “The Research Paper,” 128.

have mostly heard—from both students and composers—that these conversations are interesting and fruitful. After I describe the interview procedure, we brainstorm questions in class. Some of the questions we produce are broadly applicable to any interview, while others are unique queries that have arisen from a student's engagement with her assigned piece. I then post our questions online and require that every student either contribute to the list further, refine existing questions, or organize the list of questions into sensible groupings.

The remaining steps guide the student through the completion of a thoughtful written paper and a compelling presentation. First, students submit a written reflection on the interview experience. In it, they answer questions about the composer's perspective, attitude, and possible agenda. Next, students are asked to craft an outline for their paper. I assist students in developing appropriate individual theses, but the basic purpose of every project is to explore the space occupied by each composer and work in the contemporary music scene. In the next step, students draft papers that will be read aloud at the ROCC Conference. Because my classes are small, I am able to meet twice with every student to review her/his work and make suggestions for improvement or further investigation. Finally, students submit visual presentations. I offer an in-class demonstration of effective PowerPoint and provide written guidelines to help students avoid common mistakes.

The ROCC Conference is a day-long public event that combines conference-style papers with two concerts of contemporary music. In the past, all students, faculty, and community members have been invited to attend. This year, a colleague and I put out a call for additional papers, and we hosted a dozen visiting scholars who presented their work alongside my students. In order to make this feasible, half of the most recent cohort elected to draft articles in lieu of presenting, and they submitted their work to a regional undergraduate research journal. Based on the student presentations I have witnessed in the past, I feel intuitively that I have been successful in achieving my primary goal, which is to increase student interest in and awareness of recently-composed music by fostering appreciation for a handful of works and their creators. Most of my students have given impassioned end-of-term presentations in which they intercede on behalf of compositions that they have come to love and composers whom they have come to respect. I feel strongly that these presentations represent some of my students' best work.

Study Procedures and Analysis

In order to more accurately assess the impact of this project on affective engagement with contemporary music, I surveyed my students over a two-year period. The study required that I submit an application to conduct research

with human subjects to my university's IRB, which granted my request for exempt status. In 2015, I offered a single questionnaire at the end of the term. It contained 23 five-level Likert-type items with a range from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" and six open-ended questions. The questionnaire required students to report the changes in their attitudes and perceptions that had taken place over the course of the semester. In 2016, I offered an initial questionnaire on the first day of class and a parallel follow-up questionnaire on the last day of class. The first questionnaire contained 13 five-level Likert-type items and six open-ended questions; the second questionnaire contained 16 five-level Likert-type items and nine open-ended questions. The additional questions concerned specific reactions to the research project and course. By offering two separate questionnaires at the beginning and end of the term, I was able to capture a more reliable picture of any change that took place. Unfortunately, the class was much smaller (2015: $n=10$; 2016: $n=5$), so the data collected cannot assume the same representational force. I will therefore report the results of both studies for the sake of offering the most comprehensive analysis.

I analyzed the Likert-type items in terms of distribution. Although some items failed to return compelling results, others provided a great deal of insight. This was the case when responses were unanimous or near-unanimous, indicated a clear shift over the course of the semester, or were widely distributed so as to indicate a variety of attitudes. Because most of the students did not provide detailed answers to the open-ended questions and skipped some altogether, coding proved meaningless. Instead, I used their responses to open-ended questions to add depth to the results I gathered from the Likert-type items with which they correlated. I will include excerpts from the written responses below.

When I designed the questionnaires, I chose to employ the term "New Music" throughout as a convenient shorthand for the repertoire in question. The term was defined on the instruments as "art music created recently (last 10 years) by living composers." I never used the term "New Music" in class and it only rarely appeared in assigned readings. I now regret having introduced such a loaded term—one that partisans would probably not even consider to encompass most of the music under consideration—into this study, and it should be understood as referring to my own broad definition when it appears in comments excerpted from the questionnaire.²⁷

27. For example, the Zeitgeist New Music Ensemble defines "New Music" as music that "represents the cutting and creative edge of classical music" and "may take repeated hearings" before a listener can develop an appreciation for it—a definition that favors experimental music ("What is New Music?," *Zeitgeist*, accessed September 25, 2017, <http://www.zeitgeistnewmusic.org/what-is-new-music.html>).

Results and Discussion

The Likert-type items that elicited a wide range of responses in both 2015 and 2016 were those concerning attitudes towards contemporary art music before taking the class. These items probed the student's likeliness to attend a concert of contemporary music, awareness of living composers, assumptions about contemporary music, and interest in contemporary music. The broad frequency distribution of responses indicates that students came into the class with varying levels of exposure, interest, and awareness.

In their answers to the open-ended questions, none of the students exhibited any awareness of experimental art music. Instead, they wrote about their experiences performing recent choral and band literature or attending progressive rock concerts. In 2015, one student recalled that, at the start of the semester, "I already appreciated New Music—in particular Eric Whitacre, Jason Robert Brown, etc." In 2016, a student mentioned "contemporary classical music, particularly movie scores," and "progressive rock groups like Dream Theater or Steve Wilson." Another student cited contemporary worship music. These responses shed light on what seem to be shared student experiences, and I am heartened to learn that my students don't necessarily perceive walls between the worlds of art music, film score, and rock. Indeed, the course itself questions these distinctions, as do several of the composers whom my students interview. At the same time, these responses reveal the narrowness of the research project, which does not extend beyond the world of trained composers in the Western art music tradition. It might serve this project well to include professional rock musicians, or rappers, or representatives of non-Western traditions, or other creators of music that have long been excluded from the "art music" curriculum. At the same time, one of my goals with this project is to reveal how conservatory-trained composers—people who, like my students, were music majors in college and chose to pursue careers in that field as composers, performers, and educators—interact with musicians and institutions, disseminate their work, and make a living.

The only statement addressing pre-term attitudes that elicited a near-unanimous response across the two classes concerned the students' interest in learning about contemporary music. Most students in the 2015 cohort and all students in the 2016 cohort indicated that, whatever their perceived level of experience, they were enthusiastic about gaining exposure and knowledge. (The questionnaires were anonymous, so hopefully the participants did not feel compelled to provide the answer they thought I was looking for.)

Responses to the statements concerning post-semester attitudes were, in general, in greater agreement. Students in both classes reported with near-unanimity that they would attend a concert of contemporary music if it was

convenient and that they could name several living composers. The 2015 cohort reported that they had become aware of the existence of a vibrant contemporary music scene, but the 2016 cohort demonstrated little change (at least quantitatively) in awareness from the start of the term. Both classes were in unanimous agreement that they would attend a concert of music by the composer they had studied if it was convenient. This attitude was supported by answers to the open-ended questions. All of the students reported positive experiences working with their assigned composers and most emerged from the project with great respect for them as individuals and artists. "My composer is a genius," wrote one student in 2015. Another wrote, "I somewhat used to like listening to New Music beforehand, but now I'd listen to Ted Hearne (and others like him) all the time."

A few of the Likert-type items failed to measure any appreciable change in attitude over the course of the semester. These were negative statements about the general character of recently-composed music, including that it is "difficult to understand," "not fun to listen to," and "not interesting." Neither class reported a significant change in attitude concerning any of these assessments. Their comments, however, provided some insight. The 2015 class exhibited significant ambivalence towards contemporary music after completing the course and research project. One student reported, "I know I can find New Music that is pleasing to play and hear as well as New Music I don't find pleasing." Another wrote, "I still don't like it [serialism] but I better understand its purpose and don't have as much of a disdain for it." Another student seemed to agree, writing, "Even if I don't like the music I can appreciate the purpose behind it." Several students in the 2016 class reported that they had become "more open + understanding of New Music." One wrote, "I like it more for sure. It was hard to listen to at first but it has gotten better."

The 2016 class was asked to respond to three Likert-type statements that did not appear on the 2015 questionnaire. One of these statements, concerning the belief that composers have something valuable to contribute to the art music tradition, elicited a positive response at the beginning and end of term. The other two statements, however, generated less positive trends. The first of these sought to evaluate the students' opinions on the importance of actively supporting living composers. At the beginning of the semester they generally indicated that it was important to do so, but at the end of the semester they expressed the belief that it was less important to do so. The second item sought to evaluate the students' opinions on the importance of patronizing concerts of music by living composers. The results were generally negative and did not change over the course of the semester. Because the sample size was so small, it is perhaps more meaningful to derive conclusions from the students' written comments, which tended to contradict their Likert-type statement responses. When asked

whether it was important for musicians to listen to recently-composed music or to attend concerts, one student wrote, “I do think it is important because musicians must understand the environment in which we work, + to support one-another.” Another responded, “I do. Because we should be supporting new composers and getting a feel of how music is changing.” The students also indicated an awareness that “there is not a lot of money in composing,” a topic that often arose in the interviews and subsequent presentations.

The open-ended questions in both questionnaires were generally intended to gauge the relative impact of the lectures and research project on student knowledge and appreciation of contemporary music, but they were not entirely successful in doing so. For the most part, students were not able to differentiate between “knowledge” and “appreciation,” and they often recorded specific facts that they had learned instead of reflecting generally on the experience. Answers from the 2015 class concerning the value of the textbook ranged from, “Most of my textbook reading resulted in me walking away with not much information,” to, “The textbook helped me understand some of the techniques used by my composer. My composer drew from many music styles, genres, and time periods. The book helped me gain background knowledge.” One 2016 student was able to report that “The thorough + detailed material [in the textbook] helped me appreciate New Music more, for sure,” while another remarked, “The wording is hard for me to understand but I think it did help knowledge.” It seems that some students had better reading and analytical skills than others, and they were therefore varyingly successful in making use of the text.

However, answers to a final question, “What part of this class had the single biggest impact on your attitude towards New Music?” clearly revealed that the research project influenced the students’ engagement with and interest in the material. Answers from 2015 included “The listening to, writing about, and the (#1) participation as an audience member to the presentations;” “The project. It gives an actual voice to what I think of as the ‘modern composer’;” and, “The opportunity to speak to a modern day composer.” One 2016 student responded, “The day we did our presentations + I was able to examine all of the different types of New Music + composers.”

Although the surveys did not include a question that explicitly sought to determine as much, it appears that secondary research related to the project was an important source of knowledge. As one student reported, “Although I was only interviewing one composer, I had to investigate others in order to compare and contrast styles.” Another connected the project to what we had learned over the course of the semester: “After doing a detailed analysis of my composer’s life and music, I saw how new music in many cases is rooted in antiquity and brings many ideas together. There is really ‘nothing new under the sun.’” In terms of appreciation, the students revealed that speaking with

composers was a transformative experience. “I really appreciate the work that composers do, because it is so complex,” wrote one student in 2015. “It is fascinating learning about their compositional process.” Another wrote, “It gives me a better understanding of where composers are coming from. It’s also really cool to tie modern composers into the music history canon.” I was very gratified to read this final remark. One of the main purposes of this project is to demonstrate that the canon is not closed, and that composers continue to produce exciting and worthwhile music.

Conclusion

Overall, this study has confirmed my subjective observation that students enjoy the project and emerge from the experience with a genuine affection for the work and composer they had studied. Their unanimous interest in attending a hypothetical concert by their composer, combined with a high frequency of comments citing the interview and research project as having a positive effect on their appreciation of contemporary art music and on their experience in the class, offer clear evidence.

Although I set out to study the impact of this research project on the affective engagement of students with contemporary art music, this engagement has not ultimately been what I value most about the assignment. Instead, it has become apparent to me that the opportunity to include composers from underrepresented groups is the most significant and powerful aspect of this activity. The students invariably develop sympathy with their composers’ struggles and ambitions, and they are eager to advocate for them during the final presentations. Music becomes a conduit for making connections across borders of race, class, orientation, and politics. The inclusion of female composers and composers of color has also revealed the crisis of their omission from the standard curriculum. During the 2016 ROCC Conference, one presentation focused on the composer’s experiences with sexism, both in the profession and in everyday life. In the question period, a student in the audience suggested that perhaps women simply weren’t good at composing. This led to a lively, thoughtful, and surprisingly civil discussion about the challenges that women face in various fields of work and the many reasons for which women have been excluded from the world of public music making and, consequentially, canonic music history. If this discussion had been the only benefit of the research project it would have made the effort worthwhile.