Program and Program Notes

Percentage of Grade with Revision (20%)

For this assignment, I am asking that you construct a concert program of works from the classic era and provide program notes of no fewer than four (4) full pages, double-spaced, using no larger than a 12-point font. Both a draft and revision must be submitted, each worth 50% of the final grade for the assignment. I will also be asking that you share your notes with your classmates for peer review.

If you select a large-scale work, such as a Haydn oratorio or a Mozart opera, you need only write about this one work but in greater detail than if you select several smaller-scale pieces. If you choose several works, place them in the order you believe will be most effective in performance. As you are determining the order, consider stage logistics and how you will arrange your selections in terms of mood, difficulty, placement of performers and the time it takes to get everyone situated, etc. to result in the most successful concert. You may limit yourself to a single ensemble or you may combine solo and chamber works. Aim for a program of 1 ½ to two hours of music with intermission. If you select a single larger work that occupies the entire concert, your time will likely vary from this target. You may also select a moderately lengthy work that will require the last half of the program, reserving shorter works for the first half. As you can see, several options are possible.

Once you have 1) made your selections and before you begin writing your notes, I ask that you 2) locate what you consider an excellent example and a poor example of program notes online, arrange to provide me with a copy with your submitted draft, and provide an explanation for your choice and critical assessment. These pre-existing notes should NOT be on the works you have selected for your own program, although you will no doubt find it beneficial to investigate notes on works in the same or similar genre(s).

To help you with your search and assessment, I have provided you with links to program notes for selected works performed by the New York Philharmonic. There are many more available on the NYPhil’s site and those of other major ensembles, of course, so feel free to explore. The samples below and others you may be drawn to will give you an idea of the type of information provided for an audience member who is accustomed to attending concerts of classical music and may even be a season ticket holder.

Haydn: Symphony No. 103 “Drumroll” - http://nyphil.org/~media/pdfs/program-notes/1415/HaydnSymphony%20No%20103.ashx?la=en
And from the archives: http://archives.nyphil.org/index.php/artifact/fba6124c-af41-4974-b8fc-0cafd0b1e0e/fullview#page/6/mode/2up

3) For your own set of notes and using as a model what you have determined are exemplary examples, please include the following:

- A brief but relevant bio of the composer
- The cultural context in which the work or works were created
- Relevant historical information about the work(s) selected, including genesis, commission if relevant, intended venue, premiere, reception, and other details you believe your audience should be aware of to appreciate (and enjoy) the music.
- Finally and of critical importance, supply an invitingly written and simple analysis, focusing on important moments in the music in order to guide the listener through the concert in a logical and non-threatening manner. The description of the music should be easy to follow as the work is being performed, giving the audience member several musical events to listen for.
- NOTE: For any short vocal works: the original text(s) and English translation(s) in two corresponding columns. Operas and oratorios do not need translations for this assignment.
Tone: Your audience is savvy in terms of classical music but may not know the historical details of the works being presented or why the composer wrote them. They will know the composer’s name and basic facts but not many details, particularly in terms of those works you have selected for your program and their cultural context. You must, therefore, educate your audience in terms of this information.

For this assignment, you should, as always, pay close attention to grammatical and style issues. You may find it helpful to read your work aloud, perhaps even to a colleague for feedback on clarity and style. Make sure each sentence progresses logically to the next. Sometimes a simple phrase of transition is all that is necessary to smooth out a rough spot. Also keep in mind the necessity to provide topic sentences for each paragraph, from which the remainder of the information in that paragraph will logically follow.

Program notes typically keep citations to a minimum, if they are even included at all, but for the purposes of this assignment, please provide information on all sources consulted using the Chicago Manual of Style rules. Purdue University’s in-depth website details these rules <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/> . DO NOT include the bibliography, text and translations, or footnotes in your required page count. Remember to reference your sources if you quote, paraphrase, or rely upon another person’s research when the cited material is not considered general knowledge (i.e., available in five or more sources).

It is my hope that this assignment will have practical value for you. But along the way, don’t forget to enjoy the music and the information you discover.