

Introduction to Music Composition (HUMA2103)

School of Humanities, HKUST

Fall 2019

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| Instructor: | Ilari Kaila |
| Email: | kaila@ust.hk |
| Office hours: | TBA/by appointment |
| Office: | Music Room B, University Center (ground floor) |
| Instructional Assistant: | Galison Lau |
| Email: | galisonlau@ust.hk |
| Lectures: | Wed, 12:00–1:50 PM |
| Room: | G005, CYT Bldg |
| Tutorials: | Thu 9:30–10:20 AM Fri, 10:30–11:20 AM Fri, 3:00–3:50 PM |

Course description

Studying the elements of composition is akin to learning an instrument: while understanding theoretical concepts is important, the crucial task is to practice their application hands-on and systematically. In this course, the students will explore ways to mold their own musical language and ideas through composition exercises, analysis of repertoire, study of music theory, and improvisation. The intuitive and technical aspects of composing are two sides of the same coin—rigorous technique forms the basis for the spontaneous side of expression, and improvisatory exploration brings insight into understanding theoretical concepts. Learning correct notation, production of performance materials, and working with performers will also be important aspects of the course.

There is no final examination for this course. As the final project, the students' compositions will be performed in concert. A preliminary composition exercise is also due in lieu of a midterm examination, and will be performed in class (audience welcome to attend!).

Intended learning outcomes

On successful completion of the course, you will have

- developed your overall creative thinking;
- gained the ability to express yourself through writing music;
- a deeper appreciation and understanding of music, regardless of style;
- stronger musicianship skills; and
- a wider and practical understanding of music theory.

Prerequisites

While you do not need to have extensive musical background to sign up for the course, you should have basic music reading skills (such as acquired in HUMA 2104) and the ability to play an instrument.

Course requirements

1. Most of what you learn will be assimilated in class—attendance, therefore, is crucial. You will also need to attend one of the tutorials each week. From time to time, tutorials will be replaced with one-on-one composition lessons. You must also participate in the final concert (on Friday, November 29, 2019) and organize the rehearsals of your work. *If you are unable to commit to the concert date you cannot take this class.*
2. Midterm project: composition of a duet or solo work, with a duration of at least one minute. Depending on the nature of your project, this can also be the first draft of your final composition project (this will be decided on a case-by-case basis).
3. Final project: a work for two or more players, duration at least two minutes.
4. We will have some professional performers for the final concert. However, *you need to make sure you have secured all performers* for your final composition and midterm—and for the midterm, we will not have a budget to hire any of the players. Take this into consideration when deciding what instrument(s) to write for. We will help you with this by providing names and contact information of musicians who have volunteered to participate in the past—ultimately, making sure you have the players for your piece and scheduling rehearsals *will be your responsibility*.
5. You need to hear one professional live concert featuring classical music (contemporary and 20th-century music are particularly recommended), and write a three-to-five-page, double-spaced concert report. I will give you options and suggestions, including multiple free concerts happening on campus, or, if you have a particular event in mind, let me know beforehand.

Grading

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| Attendance and participation | 15% |
| Portfolio of exercises/homework | 15% |
| Concert report | 15% |
| End-of-semester quiz | 10% |
| Midterm project | 20% |
| Final project | 25% |

LECTURES:

Week 1: Wed, September 4

- Introduction to class
- Thinking and listening like a composer: interaction of parameters; musical form

Week 2: Wed, September 11

- More on musical form: large-scale vs. small scale form
- Basics of melodic: crafting a line; melodic procedures

Week 3: Wed, September 18

- More on melodic writing: motivic work
- Contrapuntal thinking: combining two melodies
- Preparation for concert report: guidelines, writing good prose; concert etiquette

Week 4: Wed, September 25

- The human voice, text, and rhythm and melodic thinking
- More on counterpoint: harmonic (vertical) vs. melodic (horizontal) dimensions
- Instrument demos begin; exact dates TBD based on performers' availability

Week 5: Wed, October 2

- Harmonic thinking; non-tonal harmonies
- Acoustics, human physiology, time: overtone series; consonance vs. dissonance
- Orchestration: overview; writing for string instruments
- Instrument demonstrations begin (subject to availability of players)

Week 6: Wed, October 9

- *Everyone presents their initial plan for midterm composition project*
- More on harmonic work and non-tonal counterpoint
- Producing scores and parts

Week 7: Wed, October 16

- Modal and artificial scales (non-major/minor scales)
- Pitch collections as both melodic and harmonic material
- More on instrumentation: woodwind instruments

Week 8: Wed, October 23

MIDTERM IN-CLASS CONCERT:

PERFORMANCE OF STUDENT COMPOSITIONS!

Audience welcome to attend!

Week 9: Wed, October 30

- Rhythmic techniques: momentum; form; polyrhythms and tuplets
- More in-class instrument demonstrations
- *Everyone presents their initial plan for a final project composition*

Week 10: Wed, November 6

- Polyrhythmic thinking
- More on rhythm and form

Week 11: Wed, November 13

- *Full first drafts of final project due, and presented in class!*
- No tutorials: One-on-ones sessions and rehearsals, with me and Galison Lau (IA).

Week 12: Wed, November 20

- *End of semester quiz: terminology, analytical listening*
- Scores and performance materials must be finished
- Rehearsals and one-on-one-sessions

Week 13:

Dress rehearsal and FINAL CONCERT:

Friday, November 29, 2019. CYT building, LTL

Please note: Reserve the whole day. If you cannot commit to this date, you cannot take this course!