

## **Introduction to Music Composition (HUMA2103)**

School of Humanities, HKUST – Spring 2021

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Office hours:	TBD and by appointment
Office:	Music Room B, University Center (ground floor)
Instructional Assistant:	Galison Lau
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Lectures:	Tue, 12:30–2:20 PM
Tutorials:	Wed 3:30–4:20 PM Wed, 6:00–6:50 PM Thu, 2:30–3:20 PM
Room:	Online (until possible further notice about in-class teaching)

### **Course description**

Studying the elements of classical 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, and increasingly towards the end of the semester.

2. You must also participate in the final concert (currently schedule for either Thursday May

6 or Friday, May 7, 7:30 PM, to be decided later) and organize the rehearsals of your own work. *If you are unable to commit to these dates, you cannot enroll in this course!*

3. 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).

4. Final project: a work for two or more players, duration at least two minutes.

5. We will hire professional performers for the final concert. However, if you need additional players, it is up to you to secure them. The performers also need to meet our requirements for technical proficiency, in order to be presented at an HKUST concert. Take this into consideration when deciding what instrument(s) to write for. If you are a performer yourself, you are encouraged (but not obligated) to play in your own work.

6. For the midterm composition, we will not have a hired ensemble. We will help you find players 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*.

7. This semester will be the inaugural season of HKUST's new cross-cultural music and arts initiative, the **Cosmopolis Festival**. Attendance in at least two Cosmopolis events is mandatory, and your term paper will be in the form of a concert report. For this class, students can choose two from the following four options:

(1) Rachel Cheung in Concert: solo piano recital on Friday, April 9, 7:30 PM.

(2) Hong Kong Chamber Project: new and traditional chamber music. Date to be confirmed, either Wednesday, April 28 or Friday April 30, 7:30 PM.

(3) A Night at the Opera: a rarely heard one-act opera by Donizetti, and selections of other operatic scenes. Thursday, April 29, 7:30 PM.

(4) Defunensemble: Electroacoustic contemporary chamber music group from Finland; depending on travel restrictions, this concert may be moved online. Tuesday, May 4, 7:30 PM.

*If you are not able to attend two Cosmopolis events, you cannot enroll in this class.*

The festival also involves a number of workshops, public lectures, and masterclasses that are open to HKUST music students. We will give you more information over the course of the semester.

### **Grading**

Attendance and participation	15%
Portfolio of exercises/homework	15%
Term paper (Cosmopolis event)	15%
End-of-semester quiz	10%
Midterm project	20%
Final project	25%

## LECTURES:

### Week 1: February 2

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

### Week 2: February 9

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

### Week 3: February 16

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

### Week 4: February 23

- More on counterpoint: harmonic (vertical) vs. melodic (horizontal) dimensions
- Instrument demos begin; exact dates TBD based on performers' availability

### Week 5: March 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: March 9

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

### Week 7: March 16

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

### Week 8: March 23

### **MIDTERM IN-CLASS CONCERT:**

#### **PERFORMANCE OF STUDENT COMPOSITIONS!**

Audience welcome to attend!

### Week 9: March 30

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

### **April 6 – Easter, no class**

### Week 10: April 13

- Polyrhythmic thinking

- More on rhythm and form

**Week 11:** April 20

- *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:** April 27

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

**Week 13:**

- **Rehearsal for most of the week.**
- **Dress rehearsal and FINAL CONCERT: Thursday May 6 or Friday, May 7,**

**7:30 PM.** Please note: reserve the whole day for the concert. If you cannot commit to these dates, you cannot take this course. We will finalize the concert date on the second day week of class.