

HUMA 2103: Introduction to Music Composition

DHSS, Division of Humanities, HKUST – Fall 2024

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Lectures:	Mondays 2:00–3:50 PM
Location:	Shaw 103
Tutorials:	Fridays 9:00–9:50 AM, 10:00–10:50 AM, 11:00–11:50 AM
Location:	Shaw 103

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.

This class is extremely labor-intensive. 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. 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' chamber music compositions will be performed in a public concert by a hired ensemble of professional musicians, supplemented in some cases by student performers. A preliminary composition exercise is also due in lieu of a midterm examination, and will be performed in class.

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. In tutorials, we go through students' work collectively, discussing and critiquing it; these sessions are as important as the lectures. Occasionally, tutorials will be replaced with one-on-one composition lessons, increasingly towards the end of the semester. *You are expected to participate in every class session and tutorial.* Be on time: twice late will count as once absent.

2. You must also participate in the final concert and be in charge of the rehearsals of your own work. The concert (tentative date, subject to change by first week of class) will be on the evening of Thursday, December 5, 2024, preceded by dress rehearsals. You need to reserve the entire day from noon onwards. *If you are unable to commit to the date, 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, your plan and the player(s) need to be pre-approved. Take this into consideration when deciding what instruments to write for. If you are an experienced 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*.

Term paper and concert

HKUST's flagship arts initiative, the Cosmopolis Festival, is curated to add value to our music courses. This semester, in lieu of a full festival, HKUST is presenting an off-season Cosmopolis event on Monday, October 7 at 7:30 PM: Pianist Olli Mustonen, one of the most preeminent classical musicians of our era, will give a solo recital at the Shaw Auditorium. Mr. Mustonen is also a composer, and the concert will feature the Asian premiere of his collection of inventions. *The event is mandatory. If you are not able to attend, you should not enroll in this class.*

Attendance is free, but you will need to register a seat. We will provide a registration link closer to the concert.

Your term paper will be an analytic writing assignment, based on music you hear at the event. The length is a minimum 350 words, which works out to around 1.5 pages in Times New Roman 12-point font, double spaced. More details will be given in class. You will also be provided a link to a video of the concert to assist with writing the paper (assuming MTPC will edit and publish it in due course).

Grading

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

HUMA 2103: Tentative class schedule, Fall 2024

Week 1: September 2

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

Week 2: September 9

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

Week 3: September 16

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

Week 4: September 23

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

Week 5: September 30

- 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: October 7

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

Week 7: October 14

MIDTERM IN-CLASS CONCERT: PERFORMANCE OF STUDENT COMPOSITIONS!

Audience welcome to attend!

Week 8: October 21

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

Week 9: October 28

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

Week 10: November 4

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

Week 11: November 11

- Scores and performance materials must be finished
- Rehearsals and one-on-one sessions begin

Week 12: November 18

- Rehearsals and one-on-one sessions

Week 13: November 25

- End of semester quiz: terminology, analytical listening

Dress rehearsal and FINAL CONCERT: Thursday, December 5. Please note: reserve the whole day for the concert. *If you cannot commit to this date, you cannot take this course.*