

Applying Musical Processes to Composition

William J. Kelly

Teaching Associate, Department of English and Comparative Literature

Introduction

- Define the word “composition” as the way in which information is organized. Compositional processes are the tendencies with which we organize information.
- Theoretically, we could take the compositional process of an artist in any medium and apply it to writing.
- As a result, we will analyze the compositional processes of three different musical composers: Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn.
- For each of these three composers we will discuss their unique compositional process and I will show a segment of a piece that best encapsulates their process.
- After we listen, we will imitate their compositional process through writing.
- Finally, we will evaluate the successes and failures of each compositional process.

Objectives & Materials

After the lesson, students will be able to

- create connections, relationships, and applications between two different artistic mediums.
- understand how compositional process affects style.

Materials needed:

- Scratch paper
- pen or pencil,
- computer or some kind of music player,
- classical music playlist,
- image for Step 2,
- prompts for steps 1 and 3.

Steps/Procedure

Step 1: Beethoven (Frenetic Composition) [15 Minutes]

Step 2: Mozart (Recursive) [15 minutes]

Step 3: Joseph Haydn (Linear) [15 Minutes]

Closure:

- Ask the students if they have any questions.
- Students will then be explained the guidelines for a broader, on-going project based off of this lesson plan.
- For this project, ask the students to do the same process that we did for our three composers: Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn. They must find a different musical composer and do the same steps. Students can choose a composer whose process is either similar or completely different from the composers in class. Once they apply the process to their composer, they will present it to the class.

ПРИСВЯЧУЕТСЯ ГРАФИНЕ БАБЕТТЕ ФОН КЕГЛЕВИЧ
СОНАТА
тв. 7

DER GRAFIN BABETTE VON KEGLEVICS
GEWIDMET
SONATE
op. 7

Allegro molto e con brio (♩. 120)

Analysis

Many students view composition as an inherently linear process. This lesson demonstrates that composition is not inherently linear but a combination of many different processes. Experimenting with the compositional methods of individual composers forces students to engage in an imaginative aspect of composition. Students will realize that each idiosyncratic process does not fail to produce an organically unified composition. Furthermore, as we experiment with the connections between writing and music, students can apply this method to other artistic mediums. Ultimately, this lesson is meant to make the students think differently about writing. Although this lesson plan can be self-contained, it should culminate in a broader, on-going project. This lesson plan is a good way to demonstrate to students that writing can be the product of many different processes. The main concern about this lesson is the issue of time. It might be more affective to split the lesson over two class sessions and to include a wider range of composers and their processes. Also, it might be beneficial for students if the instructor presents this information visually or through handouts. Finally, this lesson is highly conceptual and might be difficult for some students to grasp.

Franz Joseph Haydn
Sonata in C Major
(1794-5)

Allegro



Image 1

This project was funded through the Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) Project at SJSU, which is funded through the U.S. Department of Education (P382B110017).