

Arranging (MUSC171)

Andrew A. Cashner, PhD

Spring 2023, University of Rochester, Satz Dept. of Music

- Schedule
- Blackboard
- Download PDF of this page

Course Information

Description

Arranging is a key skill in any practicing musician's toolbox. Whether you are reworking an existing song for an a capella or theater group, producing a recording of an original song, or adapting music to fit the practical needs of an amateur ensemble, this class can help you craft effective and appealing arrangements. Students will develop and workshop their own projects with the class while we learn from examples by today's pop and Broadway arrangers, as well as past masters of arrangement including Bach, Mozart, and Liszt. With an emphasis on simple solutions that work for performers of varying skill levels, the course will show you how to bring out the best in the source music while presenting the performing ensemble in its best light. The course will build fundamental skills through a series of progressive assignments, while discussions will help arrangers develop a critical perspective on issues of intellectual property, racism and representation, and intercultural challenges. (4 credits)

Prerequisite: Basic ability to read music and to sing or play an instrument.

Meeting Times

- Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:05 a.m.–12:20 p.m.
- Dewey B-315
- Office hours Thursdays 1–2 p.m. or by appointment
 - You are always welcome during office hours, no appointment needed, and no agenda
- See full contact information on Blackboard

Resources and Materials

- This website will always have the current schedule and course information.
- You'll find assignments and turn them in on Blackboard.
- Music examples will be on a YouTube playlist.
- Scores will be available on Blackboard.

Required Materials

- Music-notation software: Dorico Elements 4 or Dorico Pro 4
 - Discounted licenses are available for students
- Dale Wood, *Hemidemisemiquavers... and Other Such Things: A Concise Guide to Music Notation* (Heritage Music Press, 1989)
- Alfred Blatter, *Instrumentation and Orchestration* (New York: Schirmer, 1997)

- Blank ruled music paper

Learning Goals

- Demonstrate competence in the core musicianship skills needed for arranging.
- Demonstrate the ability to compose a creative, appealing, and well-constructed arrangement that is notated clearly and playable by the target musicians.
- Demonstrate knowledge of basic instrumentation and orchestration.
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze an existing arrangement and identify how the new version transforms the original and what technical features of the arrangement make it effective.
- Develop an informed, critical perspective on cultural and ethical challenges in arranging:
 - Develop a practical vision for how arranging can support or challenge racist and oppressive structures.
 - Understand legal and ethical issues of intellectual property and appropriation.

Assessments

Weekly homework

The course is designed to prepare you to do the assignments listed below by working up through a series of weekly homework assignments. Some of these assignments overlap with the ones below so that by the time you have done the homework, you will have completed the other assignment as well. Homework assignments are listed in the course schedule, and are always due at the start of class on the first class session of each week (normally Tuesday).

Homework assignments are graded as either “Good Enough,” “Incomplete,” or “Zero”:

- Good Enough: You completed the assignment, and demonstrated effort to learn and progress.
- Incomplete: Something important is missing or the quality standard needs to go up substantially.
- Zero: No assignment submitted, zero effort shown.

Pop song arrangement

Starting from an existing lead sheet, arrange a popular song of your choice for amateur SAB chorus with piano accompaniment and one obbligato instrument of your choice. The arrangement should achieve two main goals: (1) it should present the song in a way that is recognizable but also creative, and (2) it should highlight the ensemble and present them at their best. Include a short (c. 500 word) introduction giving a brief history and background of the song and explaining your goals in arranging it this way.

- The choice of song should be approved by the professor. The song could be of any style or origin as long as the original version should have a vocal line with words, and it is the sort of song that an amateur choir (say, a middle-school choir) would look forward to singing.
- The piece should be playable by amateur musicians, such as a school or church choir with student instrumentalists.
- In addition to a lead sheet, you may choose a single “reference recording” as your source. If you need an extra challenge you may make your own lead sheet by ear from a recording.
- The notation must be sufficiently clear and consistent to convey everything the ensemble needs to know about what to sing or play, and in what kind of style, character, and speed. Everything must be fully notated. If there are improvised elements, the notation should also make clear what you expect from those portions.
- Submit a Dorico file and a PDF of the full score, plus the performing part for the obbligato instrument.
- I will expect you to give credit for the original song and any other sources you use (e.g., “Based on the recording by Person with Band, CD #12345 (Label, Year)”).

- This arrangement must be 100% your own original work, though of course it is based on a pre-existing song. You may consult existing arrangements but your version should be completely your own. The more versions by other people you look at, the harder you will have to work to make your version different from theirs, and you will have to cite all sources used.

Piano reduction

Given a source piece for orchestra, arrange the music for piano solo. Capture the main melodic and rhythmic ideas, and convey something of the texture and color of the original, in an idiomatic piano part playable by a professional (your professor). You should not consult any existing piano reductions or other arrangements.

Polyphonic arrangement

Given a source piece for multiple voices (i.e., a polyphonic piece), arrange the music for an ensemble of transposing instruments (details TBD).

- There may not be more than one C instrument. If there is a C instrument it should be in a clef other than treble (e.g., viola in alto clef).
- There should be at least one brass instrument and one woodwind instrument. French horn counts as brass in this context. No unpitched percussion.
- Write playable, idiomatic parts for each instrument.
- The added voice should not duplicate any of the other voices.
- Turn in (1) a C score, (2) a transposing score, and (3) instrumental parts in the necessary transpositions and clefs.
- You may not refer to or draw on any pre-existing arrangement. This must be your original work from beginning to end.

Presentation on arranging ethics

Give a brief presentation in class and lead a discussion on a controversial case study that deals with either issues of intellectual property or racism and cultural appropriation, or both. Include a multimedia element including audio examples. Turn in your outline or script, including a bibliography of at least three items that are not Wikipedia, including full information for each item (title, author, date, where published and/or URL).

- Begin with the facts of the case: who made the arrangement, when, for whom; what was the source; how was it adapted; what have people said about why it is controversial.
- Present more than one side of the argument about your case and then, without stating your final judgment, pose a series of open-ended questions to the class to prompt a discussion.
- The important thing here, more than forming your own opinion, is to understand why the people involved take the positions they do and how arranging affects those people in real ways.
- Every presentation should include some discussion of the economic and legal aspects of the case, not just cultural discourse.
- Conclude with your own informed take on the case and how this case will impact your own arranging.

Analysis paper

Write a detailed analysis of an arrangement (selected from a given list) and its relationship to earlier versions.

- The list is set up intentionally to highlight contributions by creators of color and women.
- Identify what choices the arranger made to transform the source, interpret the effect of those choices, and suggest possible reasons why they made those choices.
- Discuss what you think the arrangement says about the musical and social values of the arranger, and reflect critically on what you think was effective or problematic, and what you might draw from this example in your own arranging.

- Be specific and detailed; refer to particular measure numbers or track timings, specific instruments, patterns, and other features. There should be a clear flow of ideas from beginning to end with no errors of spelling or grammar. Cite all sources used and make it absolutely clear how you used each source.
- About 1200 words, PDF format.

Musicianship exam

In an in-class exam, demonstrate competence in the fundamental skills needed for arranging:

- Music notation: Page layout, clef, key and time signatures, stem directions, repeat structures, articulations, lyrics; by hand and in software
- Rhythm: Common rhythmic patterns, counting and subdividing, common meters
- Melody: Diatonic solmization, accidentals, major and minor scales
- Harmony: Chord symbols, elements of a lead sheet
- Instrumentation: instrument families, clefs, transpositions, percussion notation, score arrangement

Grading

Every assignment will be graded using a rubric on Blackboard that will explain the goals and the criteria for grading. These rubrics will be available in advance so you can understand how you will be evaluated and can assess your own work before you turn it in.

40%	Weekly homework
15%	Pop song arrangement
10%	Piano reduction
10%	Polyphonic arrangement
10%	Ethics presentation
10%	Analysis paper
5%	Musicianship exam

Please note: There will be no final exam in this course.

Grade Scale

Percent	Letter
93–100	A
90–92	A-
87–89	B+
83–86	B
80–82	B-
77–79	C+
73–76	C
70–72	C-
67–69	D+
63–66	D
60–62	D-
0–59	E

Policies

Attendance, Participation, Teaching Modality

- All class sessions will be held in person and on time. There may also be some one-on-one sessions held by appointment during the normal scheduled class time.
- This is an interactive, workshop-style class, so every student must participate actively in order to accomplish the course goals, and that means you must be present in class and on time. Normal standards of professionalism in the music world will apply here as well.
- I define active participation to mean that a student was present, responded to questions, and contributed to discussions with both speaking and engaged listening.
- Class sessions may be recorded for my improvement as a teacher only. They will not be made available to students as a substitute for in-person attendance except in rare, serious cases (e.g., death in the family, hospitalization).

Due Dates and Late Assignments

- The assignments are due at on the day and at the time listed on the schedule, via the relevant assignment portal on Blackboard.
- I am happy to grant assignment extensions or modifications as they are needed, but I must to do them in advance of the due date and in writing. Do not assume that I will grant an extension once a deadline has passed.
- I will accept weekly homework assignments up to one week after the due date, with a letter-grade deduction. I will not grade these assignments if they are turned in more than one week after the due date. The homework assignments build on each other, so take care not to get behind in them.
- For assignments other than the weekly homework assignments (e.g., pop arrangement, analysis paper), without an extension, I will accept late assignments for up to 50% credit at any time up until the beginning of the final class session. (That is, the last schedule class day, before finals; not the last day of the semester.)

Academic Honesty

- You must adhere to the university's policies for academic honesty. In short this means doing your own work, and not giving or receiving unfair or non-permitted help on your work.
- The university requires me to report every case of academic dishonesty to the Academic Honesty Board, and I will report every case.
- Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, which means using other people's ideas and words with giving them appropriate credit, including verbatim copying and missing, false, or misleading citations.
- You must cite the full source for any material you use, especially if you use the exact wording of the source (in which case you should also be using quotation marks and citing a page number or specific reference). It is your responsibility to make sure your audience knows where you got your information and what you did with that information. In an oral presentation, you must indicate verbally any material that you are taking directly from another source.
- If you have any questions about what constitutes academic honesty in this course, I am eager to help you; please reach out before you turn in an assignment.

Disability Accommodations

If you need a disability accommodation, please contact the Disability Office and they will let me now how to accommodate you without specifying the nature of your disability.

Anti-Oppressive Goals

This course advocates an active anti-oppressive, anti-racist position that seeks to use the study of music to undo social structures that oppress people and instead to build a just society where all people are respected

and celebrated for their intrinsic and inestimable value. There has never been a values-neutral course, and indeed throughout their history, American music departments and schools of music have not only fostered a Eurocentric curriculum, but have actively supported a program of white supremacy. In choices of what to cover and how, what music to promote and what to ignore, and in decisions about hiring, promotion, and institutional investments, universities have consistently and systematically discriminated against women, people of color, and sexual/gender minorities. We have inherited social structures that actively oppress people, and if we do not oppose those structures then we will be perpetuating them. Declaring ourselves “non-racist” or ignoring the problem only makes it worse. If, on the other hand, we take an anti-racist approach and actively oppose racist and oppressive structures, then we can work to make positive change.

This course is designed give you the knowledge and tools needed to think critically about the ways that people have used music to oppress others, and to open up a space for imagining different ways of being that will enable us to build a just society. The selection of music and readings intentionally favors contributions of women and people of color, and the course is meant to spotlight social problems rather than avoid them. I do not expect us all to agree about anything except the innate worth of every human being. I do expect every student to engage with each other, with me, and with the authors and creators we study in this course in a respectful, honest, and kind manner as we work together in pursuit of greater understanding and seek out ways to make things better.

Creating a Supportive Classroom Community

I need your help in creative a supportive community in our classroom. I want to build a space in which students feel safe enough to take the risks necessary to engage with new ideas and develop new skills. We must be careful to avoid any kind of bullying or harrassment; and we must cultivate respect, humility, and kindness. No point of view is out of bounds for discussion, as long as we can find a respectful and sensitive way to talk about it.

I will give you opportunities for feedback throughout the course and I would ask, please let me know if there is anything I can do (or anything I need to change) in order to accomplish these goals. Please be reflective about your own contributions to the classroom environment as well.