

Considering Musical Style

After graduation from UD, you take a job with a newly re-reorganized record label. One day, shortly after your arrival, one of the record execs shows up at your carrel with a large box of CDs. He explains that, when sorting through their back inventory, the department in charge of the recording library found several large boxes of unidentified CDs with no distinguishing marks on them. Due to upcoming renovations, it is essential that these CDs are digitalized and catalogued right away. However, they cannot be catalogued without first being classified. Unfortunately, the classification department is completely swamped and does not have time to both sort and label these CDs before the required deadline. Given the solid musical training that you have received at UD, the record exec tasks you with going through the unlabeled CDs and sorting and grouping them according to their musical style. These grouped CDs will then be given to the record company's classification specialists along with your musical rationalization for your grouping. This will cut their task in half, allowing them to do what they do best: determine and label the composer(s) of each work.

Pre-problem Questions

1. What is style?
2. What are the elements of style?
3. How does one go about determining the elements of style in a given work?

Task at Hand:

Listen to the recording assigned to your team. (Your assigned CD will be the CS in the box that shares the same number as your team. For example, team 1 is assigned CD# 1; team 2 is assigned CD# 2; etc.) Carefully discuss and note the stylistic elements of the recording with your teammates. Then listen to the remaining CDs in the box. Of these recordings, your team will select four CDs that most closely match the style of your assigned recording and that can subsequently be grouped together because they share similar musical style traits.

Your team may follow any process that it chooses in selecting the four CDs that most closely match the style of your assigned CD. Once your team has a completed list of five CDs (assigned work + 4 others), create a PowerPoint that contains: 1) a list of the five CDs your team has grouped together (make sure you have noted which of the five your assigned CD was), and 2) a rationale for why your team has included each track in this grouping. In class on Friday, your team will present your choices to the class in a five minute presentation. Be sure that your

presentation makes very clear which salient musical features you have used to group these CDs together.

Grading Considerations:

You will be graded on how clearly and accurately you make the musical case for your CD grouping and on the clarity and care with which you present your work via PowerPoint. (Please consult the grading rubric available on Canvas.) Remember: there is no single “correct” answer for the groupings, but there are definite “wrong” answers. The problem that your team needs to focus on is making sure that you can justify your decisions with concrete musical analyses of the stylistic features of each piece.

Box of CD Contents

(This is not distributed to students!)

Excerpt # 1: Haydn, Symphony No. 104, mvt. 3

Excerpt # 2: Ives, Putnam's Camp

Excerpt # 3: Vivaldi, Violin Concerto in C minor, "Il sospetto", mvt. 1

Excerpt # 4: Telemann, Concerto in E Minor for strings, oboe, basso continuo, mvt. 1

Excerpt # 5: Mahler, Symphony No. 1, mvt. 3

Excerpt # 6: Bach, Brandenburg Concerto #2, mvt. 1

Excerpt # 7: Beach, "Gaelic" Symphony Op. 32, mvt. 4

Excerpt # 8: Beethoven, Symphony No. 5, mvt. 4

Excerpt # 9: Stravinsky, Histoire du Soldat suite: Soldier's March

Excerpt # 10: Stamitz, Symphony in E-flat Major, Op. 11, No. 3

Excerpt # 11: Liszt, Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe: Zum Grabe

Excerpt # 12: Brahms, Symphony No. 1, mvt. 1

Excerpt # 13: Mozart, Piano Concerto No. 17, mvt. 1

Excerpt # 14: Handel, Overture to *Rinaldo*

Excerpt # 15: Schubert, Symphony No. 8 "Unfinished", mvt. 1

Excerpt # 16: Mozart, Overture to *Così fan tutte*

Excerpt # 17: Rachmaninoff, Piano Concerto #3, mvt. 1

Excerpt # 18: Stravinsky, Symphonies of Wind Instruments

Excerpt # 19: Corelli, Concerto No. 8 in G minor, "Christmas"

Excerpt # 20: Beethoven, Egmont Overture

Notes for Instructors & Facilitators

While this problem can be assigned to students at any stage of the history sequence, it is especially effective if presented to lower level students who are first learning how to listen for stylistic features.

Problem Objectives:

For all students, regardless of experience in the music history sequence:

- Students will listen critically and grapple with issues of style, using music to make an argument about why certain pieces should be grouped together.

For the student just beginning their study of music history:

- Students begin to consider the basic elements of style (melody, harmony, rhythm & meter, texture, timbre/sound, etc.) and how specific musical features are used to identify some stylistic elements as more salient than others in any given musical work
- Students begin to develop a working language for talking and writing about music

If used with students further along in the sequence, all of the above objectives remain in play. In addition:

- Students are able to review their knowledge of stylistic elements associated with each historical period and to consider in more detail the difference between stylistic trends like classicism and neo-classicism
- Students have the opportunity to refine the way in which they communicate about musical style.

Some Points to Keep in Mind:

When using this problem with students early in the sequence, it is essential to first introduce the idea of style and its basic elements. Early in the first course of the music history sequence, I broadly define style as a term that refers to the particular combination of musical features that marks something as distinctive and at the same time as part of a group. Additionally, I identify the main goals of style as: 1) establishing what is special or unique about an individual composition, and 2) determining which features of a composition are common to other works of its type and/or period.

The pieces included in the CD Box can be grouped in several ways stylistically. For example, you might find that some students are grouping Beethoven with Brahms or Stravinsky and Ives with Mahler. While chronologically, these groupings make no sense, a stylistic case can be made for the excerpts in question. The goal is for students to provide a musical rationale for each of their groupings that makes stylistic sense.

Optional Idea for Expansion:

If working with students who are further along in the sequence, release the names of the pieces that they have chosen to students once they have finished the problem above, and ask them to note the stylistic differences between the pieces. Finally, have students consider the following:

- Why can pieces composed in different historical style periods share similar stylistic features?
- Why can pieces composed by the same composer in the same style period sound completely different?
- Identify the shared stylistic features of the pieces composed during the same style period and/or by the same composer.