

Jihang Dai - Teaching Observation - November 19, 2024
Observed by Dr. Natalie Draper

- Good job introducing yourself, handing out materials, and framing the topic for the day - How to write a piano piece in ternary form
- You are clearly prepared, with handouts and notes on the topic. This is very important.
- When asking, “what is a character piece?” give them a little more time to think and reflect. Try asking the question in a few different ways - for example, you could follow up your first question with, “what does it mean for music to have character?” Keep asking related questions to guide them to participate. If still nobody responds, consider calling on students. You should have the piece of paper they passed around with their names, so you can call at random. If you do this “cold calling” gently and without repercussions, it will encourage them to participate. Another benefit to cold calling is that students are then aware that they *can* be called on directly and they are more likely to pay attention.
- When students are learning they retain information in a few different ways - from hearing it, from seeing it, and from writing it. It is very important for their own success that they are engaged in all three of these ways of learning. They will be more inclined to do the writing part of things if they see you writing on the board. You do have a whiteboard in this room - consider flipping it over to the blank side to use it to outline some of the things you are talking about. This way, if a student comes in late, which unfortunately several did (it is an 8 am class...), they can look to the board to see the topic for the day and to understand what is happening.
- Just as I was typing this, you made use of the whiteboard. You read my mind! Good use of the whiteboard to discuss the form of the piece.
- Also, in general, it is great that you keep asking them questions
- For core theory topics, it is worth contextualizing things a bit more - why is ternary form effective? How many other genres is it found in? Such contextualization also offers an opportunity to bring in some outside genres into your lecture, which could perk up some students who aren’t as interested in classical music. Even if you focus on the classical piece as your primary point of analysis after a more broad contextualization, students who aren’t as comfortable with classical music will likely start making cross-genre connections that will keep them engaged.
- Your engagement with the students in discussing and reviewing the augmented sixth chord is quite good - lots of gentle questions guiding them in the right direction.
- Nice mapping of the development of other parameters over the course of the piece (texture, dynamics, etc.). I wonder if it would help to actually write out “texture” and

underneath that “dynamics,” etc. on the left side of your diagram and then mapping them, just to be explicit. Then you could ask them if they could comment on how other parameters change over the course of the piece. For this particular topic, you lectured a bit more than asking questions - I'd keep asking them questions to get them involved.

- I love that you ask them about Grieg's general aims in terms of expression/portrayal. I also enjoy the discussion about specific musical gestures - this could be a good segue to talking a little bit about programmatic music. For your own information, I recommend reading Peter Kivy's *A Philosophy of Music* for some more detailed thoughts on the subjectivity of programmatic music.
- It was good that you played the recording again for them so they could consider your question about what effect the move to B has on the music. In general, the more the music can be in their ears the better. I would actually say that in the beginning of this class, it might not have been a bad idea to have played the recording of the piece twice. Once so they get oriented and once again so they can focus on form/character/etc. You can even frame it that way for them. You know this piece very well; they do not.
- Smart to have another example with the Tchaikovsky.
- Since the topic is “How to write a piece in ternary form,” I think you should save some more time at the end of the class to move away from the analysis of these two pieces and to walk them through what *they* are going to do. You address this a bit, but I think it could be more formalized. You could even walk them through a bit of your own process - how do you improvise a first idea? Do you start with a character idea? Then find a melody or a gesture or a rhythm or a harmony? Then you could work on pre-comp ideas with them - how to create a map for themselves. Discuss which skills (transposition, modulation, etc.) they may need to get from one section to another and to generate more music.
- Overall - good job, Jihang!