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Designing The Grand Narrative Approach in Teaching Western Music History to Undergraduate Students at Universitas Pelita Harapan

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Abstract

Learning the history of any course subject is an enormously complex study since it keeps evolving from its origin. The same case also applies to the study of Western music history, which complexity is simplified into "periodization" by scholars; therefore, the whole conception is still changing today. This condition should be perceived to explore this massively diverse body of music. The learning of music history opens various possibilities of exploring the emotional message on the score. However, the common pedagogical approach of Western music history has been discouraging to music students in general because of the "vertical" approach, which emphasizes the compartmentalized timeframe that seems irrelevant to their performances today. This teaching results lacks comprehension since learning music history should be conveyed in a chronologically sequential order into one single coherent story. The purpose of this writing is to suggest a more relevant pedagogy in teaching Western music history to undergraduate students at Universitas Pelita Harapan by understanding the grand narrative – an acculturation from two ancient traditions (Europe and West Africa) that is cultivated in the United States. Descriptive study is applied to conclude how crucial students to understand the whole narrative to enhance the relevance of their current study.

Keywords: Western Music; Music History; Master Narrative; Pedagogy

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Merancang Pendekatan *Grand Narrative* dalam Pengajaran Sejarah Musik Barat pada Mahasiswa S1 di Indonesia

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Abstrak

Mempelajari sejarah dalam berbagai bidang adalah pencarian yang sangat kompleks karena sejarah terus berkembang dan bahkan bergeser dari asalnya. Hal yang sama juga terjadi dalam studi sejarah musik Barat, yang kompleksitasnya disederhanakan dalam "periodisasi" oleh para ahli; oleh karena itu, konsep masih dapat berubah hingga hari ini. Kondisi ini adalah kesempatan untuk terus mengeksplorasi musik yang sangat beragam, membuka kemungkinan tak terbatas untuk mengeksplorasi pesan emosional pada partitur. Namun, pendekatan pedagogis umum dari sejarah musik Barat telah mengecewakan siswa pada umumnya karena pendekatan "vertikal", yang menekankan blok kerangka waktu terkotak yang tidak relevan dan tidak terhubung dengan pertunjukan mereka hari ini. Pengorganisasian pengajaran ini mengakibatkan kurangnya pemahaman bahwa pembelajaran sejarah musik harus disampaikan secara berurutan secara kronologis dalam satu cerita yang koheren. Tujuan penulisan ini adalah untuk menyarankan pengajaran yang lebih komprehensif akan sejarah musik Barat kepada mahasiswa musik Universitas Pelita Harapan dengan memahami naratif besar – akulturasi dari dua tradisi kuno (Eropa dan Afrika Barat) yang dibudidayakan di Amerika Serikat. Metode penelitian deskriptif diterapkan untuk mendapatkan kesimpulan bahwa dengan mengerti naratif sejarah, mahasiswa akan lebih mengerti transisi antar periode dan tidak lagi melihat studi sejarah sebagai sesuatu yang membosankan yang tidak relevan ke studi mereka saat ini.

Kata kunci: musik Barat; sejarah musik; narasi utama; pedagogi

Introduction

During the 16 years of teaching undergraduate music students at Universitas Pelita Harapan, I always emphasize four equally important pillars to achieve a complete performance: First, having tremendous skills is necessary to interpret music and convey student's artistry. Second, comprehensive music historical knowledge that will help student to reshape, re-evaluate, and recreate the music; the knowledge also serves as the base of performance practice and interpretation possibilities. Third, prescriptive analysis to increase student's sensitivity and awareness of harmonic language since whatever tones that come out of his finger should be well-thought; in short, he must listen first before it sounds.

The last element is philosophy as the base of achieving creatively authentic performance since it deals with fundamental questions of life existence and how he personally responds to it. These four elements must be equally developed to become a well-rounded musician.

These four pillars are one entity; music must be one and there are no disconnected parts. The performer has a mission, which is to convey the emotional message behind the written score to the audience; in that act, the performer consciously must involve his authenticity in interpretation since nobody can essentially and historically trace back the composer's original intention; therefore, student is to express his creativity to recreate the sound in an actual performance for the music to exist. When we go to a music recital, we are expecting the same music that has been written for years with creative interpretation and fresh approach from the performer, in which the amount of subjective and scholarly artistic judgment is very crucial. When all these components are unified comprehensively, the sound that the student creates would be life-transformative experience, in which every note has a very important emotional message.

It is common that student normally lacks interest in learning Western music history or any historical study because he is taught to read and memorize countless information/facts that is ineffective when the whole purpose is just to recall facts. For example, what do we learn when we read the following statements, "Ludwig van Beethoven was born in 1770 and died in 1827" or "Mozart wrote total number of 27 keyboard concerti." The two statements by themselves do not mean much unless we add an idea or an opinion to those facts – "Beethoven was born in 1770 and died in 1827, and he many considered his works to be so influential as the transition to the nineteenth century." Learning music history should enable us to attach our ideas to the facts so that they will have significance. It is inescapable to avoid the detail understanding of Mozart's piano yet performing it on a modern piano; as a result, many pianists may play the music with such singing quality without understanding the language or the musical "grammar" attached to it.

The same case happened to me during my undergraduate study, in which I learned tons of important information without being clear about the overall picture and how that information relates one another and being relevant to my performance; consequently, I did well in the class because of the professional obligation required to successfully pass. I believed the best way to learn music history was by dividing it into historical periods and memorized them as hard as possible. After these years of learning, I found it very boring and unrelated to my performance whatsoever since all those facts do not speak for themselves.

Based on my observation in teaching music undergraduate level students for sixteen years at Universitas Pelita Harapan, I analyze that there are four reasons why studying music history becomes "boring" for most Indonesian students: first, students are unable to recognize the connection between

historical eras, in which music history cannot and should not be divided by such time block chronologically, but rather by categorizing its texture (monophony, polyphony, and homophony) and harmony (modal, tonal, and post-tonal). Second, there is lack of understanding that studying music history is not just to know massive number of written music, but to try to understand it better by evaluating how music and society impacting one another. Third, students have narrow perspectives about the term "Western", which is often associated exclusively only with European art music; when students just listen to music from the West, they just listen half of story because the scope has been largely expanded and thus reaches across the globe. And last, they are unable to apply the connection between learning music history and their performances, which again, should provide such critical judgment to reshape their thoughts and approach to music.

The purpose of this writing is to expand student's perspectives on Western music history by applying the grand design of master narrative of the course, which emphasizes the connection of each historical era becoming one single coherent story. This pedagogical approach was first introduced to me during my doctoral study, and I found it very helpful to apply similarly and accordingly to music students in Indonesia's music higher education. The writing of this article is based on my personal observation and evaluation; it is my hope for UPH music students enjoy learning music history and therefore applies it to their performance and/or composition.

Narrative #1 – Defining the term Western Music"

The term "Western Music" has various interpretations, but most often students associate it only with European art music whereas the term has reached other countries, including those from the Eastern hemisphere. The term includes all the musical traditions, styles, languages, and repertories that come from two ancient musical traditions: Europe and West Africa. All these elements are currently cultivated in the United States of America for two reasons: first, the most active patronage of music today is in the north America as universities and conservatories become the center of musical activity; second, the acculturation process of the two traditions happened in north America at almost the same time – 1607 (the first Europeans to have arrived, in which they came to search for new land) and 1619 (the first Africans who were brought due to slavery, called diaspora Africans) – that have shaped American musical culture today. These two cultures intermingled with one another for the first time in Jamestown, Virginia, and hence created collective manifestations in America.

During this acculturation process, all traditions, languages, and repertories include the written music of Europe and improvised music of Africa respectively. The term "Western" also includes vast variety of styles, composers, and their works, embracing swing by Duke Ellington (1899-1974) and

"swing" by Johann Strauss (1825-1899); character piece piano music by Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) and piano rags by Scott Joplin (1868-1917); vocal music by Ray Charles (1930-2004) and vocal music by Hugo Wolf (1860-1903); and symphony by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) and symphony by William Grant Still (1895-1978). It does not stop there, but continues to American popular music, including music pre-1900 (including brass bands and minstrel music); Blues and Jazz; Tin Pan Alley and the Great American Songbook; and popular music from 1950 (including Rock n' Roll and Rap).

Of all incredibly various musical styles that happen in the West, they can be grouped into three different categories based on Richard Crawford (2001, p. iii), a leading scholar of American music and professor emeritus from the University of Michigan: folk music, which means music that circulates orally; performer's music, meaning the notation of which is intended as an outline and thus shaped by the performers; and composer's music, meaning the notation of which represents the authority of the composer and directs the performers' realization of that music. The examples of folk music include Chopin's 59 Mazurkas and Béla Bartók's Hungarian Peasant Songs; examples of performer's music include music of the eighteenth century and music written previously, in which instructions from the composers are less written, especially in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach (1686-1750); examples of composer's music include French composers during late nineteenth century – especially Claude Debussy (1862-1918), who marked all the performance instruction in details and performers should fully follow them – along with music of the twentieth century.

Another way of categorizing Western music is by its language classification: vernacular music and cultivated music, as described by Hugh Wiley Hitchcock (1988, p. i), the late American scholar. Vernacular music means music that is native to a society and culture that has been continuously practiced that becomes long tradition and grows into one's native language; whereas cultivated music means music that is imported from another cultural tradition with necessary adjustments. In summary, every country must have its own vernacular and cultivated languages; for example, the operas of Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) that are native to Italian society and culture, on the other hand, imported in other countries. Another example is the music of Charlie Parker (1920-1955), which is native to American culture, but is cultivated in Europe.

Not only the meaning of Western music includes all traditions, languages, and repertories, but also the term refers to music drawn from over a thousand of years of history, from medieval (from the ninth century) to postmodern (from 1960s). It includes music written for the concert hall but also music that was never intended for an audience. Although the best-known composers of the Western tradition were mostly working in Europe, however, it reaches across the globe today.

Narrative #2 – Music as a response to social and cultural aspects

Learning music history means to be aware of other aspects that relate directly to the making of the music itself within a certain historical period. Those aspects specifically relate to the society in which composers put their works; for example: one may ask the impact of the French Revolution in 1789 and other wars to musical compositions of the early nineteenth century, in which, from a strictly commercial perspectives, music achieved rapid progress and development, including the advances in music printing, the manufacture of instruments, the growth of public concerts, music journalism, and music education. French Revolution was an event that impacted all aspects of humanity – how it caused such traumatic experience to the society across Europe. As a result, artists chose to work in much smaller scope, only to certain number of people that they feel the closest with – often referred as "the circle," as how Franz Schubert (1797-1828) lived his musical life. Compositions that became the most popular at that time were character pieces, which indicated two things: first, they were small pieces with short duration that described one particular emotion (a person or a place); and second, the previous prominent big genres, including symphonies, concertos, chamber music, and instrumental sonatas, declined greatly in quantity.

Another example is various musical trends with stylistic diversity that were happening simultaneously in Europe during early twentieth century, in which they were sources of pleasure and anxiety for both listeners and composers; nevertheless, society demanded the spirit of innovation, especially in pursuit of expanding-to-rejecting tonality, which was one of the most basic elements in all Western music. This attitude gave rise to a variety of important styles that was based on a conviction that the new must have been as different as possible from the old, with Pierre Boulez (1925-2016), perhaps the most extreme composer to have declared that "it was not enough to deface Mona Lisa because that did not necessarily kill the Mona Lisa; all the art of the past must have been destroyed" (Hazelton, 2015).

Learning music history also relates to other ideas, including spirituality, emotion, technology, self-identity, and even nations. All these ideas have been described from the age of ancient Greece and they continually evolve to the present time; therefore, music history is a collective cycle of continuity. The correlation between music and society also applies to the African tradition, which includes evidence of Black-White acculturation, which is minstrelsy as a cultural connection between Black and White America, or Slave Songs and other Black music to the 1880s. All these music was accessible to the public as opposed to the elite class (European music), in which the role of technology and transportation were crucially important that led to a musical democratization for the development of popular music in America. In short, learning music history is concerned with people, then and today.

Note that the idea of classical music history today did not really exist until about 300 years ago; hence, all music historical labels known today is named way after they happened; for example, Baroque

in music is not known until 1919 when Curt Sachs (1881-1953), the late German-American musicologist, first applied the five characteristics of Heinrich Wölfflin's (1864-1945) theory of the Baroque systematically to music. Another example is making wrong judgment that musical styles evolve or change in chronological ways whereas they evolve in complicated ways; they do not evolve from simple to complex, and they develop in an unpredictable fashion. For example, to assume that the music of Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) is rhythmically more complex than Bach is fatal because of the wrong perspectives; we cannot just quickly state such statement since we live in the twenty-first century, which we are much closer to Stravinsky.

Learning music history is an enormous collection of individual's opinions and ideas rather that facts. Please be reminded that if the whole purpose of learning music history is just to memorize many facts, students will be discouraged and therefore stop learning because it is impossible to do so. Although it is crucial and essential to their successes, but it becomes meaningless if they cannot relate those facts to other thoughts that explain their significance. The Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Gove, 1993) defines a fact as "something that has actual existence." Fact itself does not give much information to the readers because it does not express any significance; for example, Chopin was born in 1810 and died in 1849 – there is nothing to learn in this statement other than its actual existence. What makes these facts have significance is the idea behind them – the opinion, in which we naturally and often unconsciously add to the fact. An idea is "the central or key meaning of a particular action or situation." Barzun and Graff (1985, p. 147), American historians, explain an "idea" as "an image, inference, or suggestion that goes beyond the data nameable in conventional terms." The previous information about Chopin's life and death will only become significant when there is suggestion attached to it to be relevantly meaningful, for example: Chopin was born in 1810 and died in 1849, and he was known for his exclusive dedication in composing works for solo piano or any combined chamber music that has piano involved in it, in which those works became staple standard for any piano music of the nineteenth century music. The process does not stop there since it leads to further thought of more ideas. For example, how influential was Chopin and his works to his colleagues and latter composers like Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) and Debussy? How did they emulate their early works to Chopin?

Composers of any historical time were not aware of the time scope they lived in; for example, Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) would not tell his friends that he was "Classic" by December 31, 1799 – and then he became "Romantic" by January 1, 1800; or Monteverdi was the Renaissance guy by December 31, 1599 – and then became Baroque man by January 1, 1600.

Narrative #3 – Basic vocabularies in discussing Western music history

I have found the case that student often does not know what to discuss and analyze when they are given a piece of music. There are seven basic vocabularies in discussing music history: musical tradition, musical style, period, genre, form, vernacular music, and cultivated music.

Musical tradition is the constant elements and qualities that are: slowest to change; the presence of which immediately distinguishes one musical practice from another; handed down among generations; and representing cultural continuity. In the Western music history, there are at least eleven historical traditions that traditionally have served as organizing principle in learning the course:

1. The period of Antiquity (8 BC – 5th century), which covers the legacy drawn from Ancient Greece and Rome.
2. The medieval era (5th century – 1420s), which is the discovery of all recorded and notated musical elements, from melody, harmony and texture, rhythm, and form.
3. The Renaissance period (1420s – 1599), which is the breakthrough of human civilizations.
4. The Baroque era (1600s – 1720s) of European art music, which is the age of invention since almost all musical genres and structures are entirely new.
5. Music in America before the birth of Jazz (1619 – 1880s), which ranges from the first song of native American music to Slave songs and other "Black" music to 1880s.
6. The transition from mid-to-late eighteenth century (1720s – 1810s), which emphasizes the art of natural (elegance and sentiments).
7. The "romantic" style of European and American art music (1810s – 1850s), which emphasizes the esthetic of personal expression that is often associated with tragedy.
8. The post-romantic style of European and American art music (1850s – 1880s), which is the age of "rebellion," when composers challenged the established order of tonality.
9. The history of Jazz (1880s – present time), which covers the Africanization of American music to the fusion.
10. Twentieth century European and American art music (1880s – present time), which is the popular age, the dissemination of various musical styles.
11. The history of American popular music (1880s – present time), which covers from nineteenth century social dance to Tin Pan Alley to Hip Hop to American popular music of the twenty-first century.

The American art historian, Meyer Saphiro (1904-1996) in Philipson (1961) explained style as "the constant form and the constant elements, qualities, and expression: in the music of an individual composer; in the music of a group of composers; and in the music composed within a particular historical period". For example, in order to analyze the style of Haydn, we can at least analyze three

different scopes: first, the understanding of Haydn's individual styles during his career, which mainly locates in Vienna and London; second, the understanding of a collective number of composers who wrote music that were often associated with Haydn, including Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) – in which the three were again, loosely known as "the first Viennese School;" and third, the understanding of a collective number of composers who wrote within 1720-1800 that might have influenced Haydn, including Carl Phillip Emmanuel Bach (1714-1788), Johann Stamitz (1717-1757), and George Frideric Handel (1685-1756).

A period is the chronological framework in which styles are rooted; however, a period explains insignificant musical styles since they constitute blocks of time, in which it contradicts with the whole evolution of musical styles that change far more gradually as explained by Dr. Christopher Wilkinson (2010), professor emeritus of music history at West Virginia University:

"The periodization of music history did not come about in an arbitrary fashion, but as a result of scholars' careful analyses of the styles reflected in particular composers' works and by their careful comparison of the activities and music of numerous composers active within the same generation as well as those of composers of both earlier and later generations. Note carefully that it was scholars who developed both the concept as well as the organization of historical periods. These were not created by those living either within a particular period nor by those whose lives crossed the boundary separating one period from another."

Therefore, in learning music history, it is not wise to divide the course by chronological years, but rather by its development of texture and harmonic language; only for the sake of music education that we may divide the development and evolution of musical style by periodic timeframe. Throughout eras, things change including culture, role of a certain person, politic, economy, technology, and the list goes on; however, one thing remains the same, which is the human's feeling and expression, which is the main concern in studying music.

Genre is a category of artistic composition characterized by a musical form. In learning Western music, there are generally only three types of genres: sacred vocal work, secular vocal work, and instrumental work. Note that musical genre include works that have been written for concert hall and works that have never been intended to be performed "in a serious setting," meaning for open public with complex degree of improvisation – so complex that they could not even be written down; examples of these genres include the ring shout, working songs, and spirituals. As students are pretty familiar with European musical genres, the same case may not happen regarding African music traditions, which differ in several fundamental ways from the European music: first, African music is made up of various, elaborate, and diverse ethnic groups; second, African music is a result of daily life activities that there is no hierarchy among the composer and the performer and the audience; third, African music derives

from oral tradition of extraordinary memory that the music are not written consequently; and last, the close connection between African music and dance.

Form in music means the organization of musical composition that reflects the arrangement of phrases, periods, or movements. Surprisingly, among various musical elements, composers do not experiment much with varying musical structures throughout history, unlike other elements, especially with harmonic expression.

Narrative #4 – The Organization of Music History: A Master Narrative

As discussed in the previous paragraphs that periodizing Western music history by years is not useful because music changed gradually over a course of time involving many different surrounding aspects. The better way of classifying Western music is by organizing its texture or its harmonic language.

When classifying the texture, the music history can be grouped into three:

1. Monophonic era (antiquity to ninth century with the climactic development of Gregorian chant both in sacred and secular music).
2. Polyphonic era (tenth century to the end of Renaissance in 1590s, in which music of the Renaissance is considered as the golden age of polyphonic writing).
3. Homophonic era (1600 to the present time).

When classifying the harmonic language, the music history can be grouped into three:

1. Modal harmony (medieval to Renaissance).
2. Tonal harmony (1600 to 1850s, including composer's writing of weakening tonality and tonal expansion).
3. Tonal harmony along with other harmonic languages (various musical styles in the twentieth century).

Please be reminded that the history of Western music that is currently being cultivated in the United States derives from two ancient traditions: Europe and West Africa, which both equally define and shape American contemporary music. Studying this massive content need a better organization, in which Professor Wilkinson (2010) termed as "the master narrative of Western musical history;" narrative, as described by Lawrence Stone (1979), the late professor of Princeton University, is "the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of content into a single coherent story." Music history learning should focus to the connection of each era that makes one narrative, not being compartmentalized into blocks of tine.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the goal of learning music history should help us reshape our thoughts to the music that had been written; in the act of it, we will always attach our own ideas and opinions, often unconsciously. Any study concerning historical event becomes interesting and valuable when supported by scholarly arguments that give significance to the facts. These opinions will continually grow, in which people agree and/or disagree, and that is what makes the study of music history is always interesting.

Throughout history, the evolution of music should be the most important narrative rather than just memorizing facts, which is quite irrelevant to student's performances. Music history is not just about facts; it is about social/political/technological/cultural trends, influences, developments, and inspiration. One fact and idea will always lead to another facts and ideas; for example, Beethoven was considered as the most important composer who unified a multi-movement work with the simplest idea; nevertheless, effort to unify music has been expressed since the fourteenth century Ars Nova, and the similar approach became the most ideal way of composition to the present time. The only difference is the term and how composers made some adjustments accordingly depending on the era they were working and living.

When students have this thorough understanding of music history, and when they can collectively narrate the whole grand narrative, they will have more appreciation and better understanding to apply to their performances and/or compositions. As composers always learn from their previous ones, we should also continue this way of learning because a good interpretation must first adhere to the original source as a jumping off point for interpretation before the performer can fully bring their personality and expression to the music, resulting in creating performances which offer insights into the music while also remaining faithful to the text.

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