

MUSIC HISTORY: HOW DO I FIT IT IN?
Webinar August 21, 2020 Karen Koch, NCTM, MA
HANDOUT

FIVE PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES FOR INSPIRING MUSIC HISTORY ENTHUSIASM

1. **Provide a foundational timeline structure***
2. Make history appeal to senses and emotions, not just intellect
3. Make history student-centered and relatable
4. Make history interactive
5. Make history part of the studio environment

APPLYING THE FIVE PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

1 - Providing a basic foundational timeline structure

**This is most important as a starting place to provide students with an overview of music history to which they can relate new information.*

Set some parameters of dates and determine what to omit. The goal of the foundational knowledge is to provide milestones, not details. This could be broken down into smaller chunks as well for more in-depth study, i.e. Baroque years, development of the piano, evolution of the sonata form.

Items included in the MY OWN MUSIC HISTORY Milestones Chart:

- 1600-2000 Western Musical Periods and approximate dates:
- Baroque, Classical, Romantic, 20th Century
- An associated event in American history that occurred during each period
- Best-known composer from each period
- Typical musical form from each period

2 - Making history appeal to senses and emotions

Color Code the musical periods for easier retention and for clues to the characteristics of each period.

- Baroque = yellow gold (ornamentation, royalty, nobility, high church)
- Classical = blue (refinement, balance, structure, order)
- Romantic = red (strong emotion, surprising harmony, programmatic music)
- 20th Century = green (the color of growing things, and a combination of earlier colors/styles)

*History Zap (Definition): a useful hint that does not depend on teacher preparation!:

Note that the periods are in alphabetical as well as chronological order, making it easy to learn their sequence.

Humanize, rather than idolize composers, i.e.(Mozart)“Can you imagine how would you feel if you were on a trip with your father and sister, and while you were away, your mother died?” i.e. (Beethoven)“Have you ever tried to practice with no sound from the keyboard? Beethoven lost his hearing and for much of his adult life not only could he not hear what he was playing, but he also had to imagine the sounds if the music he was composing...”

Create an imaginary environment with words, props, costumes.

- Dramatize a life incident in a composer’s life
- Have students write or copy music with only candlelight and using a quill pen
- Borrow a fancy costume or powdered wig from a local theater department to try on or photograph for a historical story time

Minimize the use of dates for young students

Without context, dates are irrelevant, though understanding who is “the oldest” is relatable. What they will remember is something that caused them to sympathize or relate to the music or life of a composer. There is plenty of time for specific dates once they have an understanding of a historically sequenced timeline.

3 – Making history student-centered

Identify a student’s composer birthday twin (composer birthdays at Classical.net)

Great for motivating student research, and they can then share in studio

Draw or write out impressions while listening to an evocative piece—especially one that they are going to be studying.

Document students’ learned repertoire

They each record their learned and performed repertoire on a growing list (color-coded by musical period). MY OWN MUSIC HISTORY teacher downloads include color-coded forms for students to use for both documenting their own repertoire and completing composer biography reports. The materials always place the student at the center of the project because it is the history of THEIR OWN music study.

Put dates into a relatable context for students

For a student whose experience places dinosaurs, President Lincoln, and Grandpa into the period called “the olden days”, the year 1685 would have no meaning. However if it could be placed into the gold Baroque period near the center of the 150 years of that period on a Milestones Chart, along with hearing the amazing fact that the three best-known composers from that period were all born in that same year, this could make it more memorable.

4 – Making history interactive

Off-screen and hands-on activities can abound with colors, stickers, report forms, and any other materials related to music history that the teacher can locate or dream up!

All of the above have been employed in the MY OWN MUSIC HISTORY student packet. Their completed charts will fit into a binder, along with their repertoire sheets, composer biographies, and even recital programs, judging score sheets, and photos.

***History Zap:** A viewbinder can be used as not only an assignment book. Now that many assignments are virtual, creating a paper record is all the more appealing for for students, beginning with that very first Milestones Chart and the second Timeline of Composers Chart which can be the front and back cover and thus be available as a constant reference and valued keepsake. When the binder cover breaks apart, they simply remove their sheets to a new binder and keep going!

5 – Making history part of the studio environment

Bulletin boards

History-themed recital based on chronology of pieces performed, an individual composer or period, etc.

Printed Free Internet Resources – Composer bios & pix, history of piano, etc.

Re-purpose your personal memorabilia and knick-knacks for history interest, ie composer bust, an old-fashioned pyramid metronome, a “field trip” inside your piano,

***History Zap:**

Students enjoy reading or hearing reports created by their peers. Assign some small research projects on a topic of interest, and then share with others on a bulletin board, over Zoom, or in a class or camp.

***History Zap:**

Make use of materials you may already have in your studio, or in ads, conference notes, or music book covers in order to point out or share tidbits of historical information that you relate to the Milestones. A waiting area is an ideal place for doing a history puzzle or browsing books.

INTERNET ZOOMING WITH HISTORY

- Take advantage of the vast internet video and audio resources via screen-share
- Relate listening assignments to the Milestones foundation that you have provided
- Add a personalized Zoom background of historical interest (search how-to on Zoom)
- Never miss a chance to toss in a brief historical reference related to the Milestones, the student, or the music!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

COMPOSER CHAOS Game by Sally Ritchie (KeysToImagination.com)

DIGITAL ESCAPE ROOM for Music History by Rosemarie Penner

Musical period focused music books, notably by Nancy Bachus (Alfred), Keith Snell (Kjos)
Google!!