Some Thoughts about Teaching Music History: A Conversation with Douglass Seaton

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> *I'm more and more convinced that we have to remember always that teaching by itself can't really exist. You can't walk into a classroom and teach, because you never accomplish it unless someone else is learning. . . . If students do learn, it doesn't necessarily mean you taught them anything, but if they don't learn, it means that you haven't taught them, despite whatever slick pedagogical tricks you've performed.*
> Douglass Seaton

Now the Warren D. Allen Professor of Music at The Florida State University (FSU) and the Coordinator of the Music History and Musicology programs at that university from 1990 to 1996 and 2008 to 2012, Douglass Seaton has taught music history and musicology to approximately 5,500 undergraduate and graduate students since he first arrived at FSU in 1978. During that time, the institution recognized the excellence of his pedagogy with two teaching awards.[1] In addition to his own teaching, he has also greatly influenced the pedagogical approach of many graduate students—including the contributors to this issue of the *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*—who are currently extending Seaton's pedagogical influence. This article consists of an introduction to Seaton's classroom pedagogy, followed by the transcript of an interview with him on 20 May 2013.

Douglass Seaton earned the PhD from Columbia University in 1977. A specialist in the music of Felix Mendelssohn and the art song, he is the author or editor of numerous scholarly books, editions, book chapters, and articles on those subjects.[2] Numerous presentations, articles, and panel discussions also attest to his interest in and attention to the pedagogy of music history.

1. In 1994 Seaton was honored with The Florida State University Teaching Incentive Award and in 1997 with the University Teaching Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching.

2. A select bibliography of Seaton's scholarship is given in the Appendix.

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Seaton's music history textbook, *Ideas and Styles in the Western Musical Tradition*, now in its third edition, embodies much of Seaton's pedagogical approach to the subject.[3] Eschewing the more encyclopedic approach found in other widely-used music history textbooks, Seaton's presentation of the history of Western music—within a conceptual framework based on epistemological foundations undergirding the dominant aesthetic models from antiquity to the twenty-first century—firmly grounds music in intellectual and cultural history in a remarkably brief volume. While names and dates are important, Seaton believes that music history should not be about "preparing students for a musical game of *Jeopardy* or *Trivial Pursuit*," and that "thinking and understanding are more important than memorization of data."[4] For Seaton, examining music from different cultures means exploring not just how one culture's music differed stylistically from that of another, but *why* it differed.

For such an approach to music history to work, a student must develop a deep understanding of and facility with music from the period under discussion; Seaton therefore spends a great deal of class time on musical analysis. Indeed, he has frequently repeated in class an episode he also recounted in print, in which he was admonished by a "wise music history teacher" that "the history of music is the music itself."[5]

In addition to the extensive use of musical analysis in class, Seaton also insists that students grapple with cultural context. As he puts it, students:

> need to be told to read Shakespeare, they need to be told to remember the Franco-Prussian War or the Spanish-American War. You don't understand music in the 1780s in Vienna unless you know something about Joseph II. You don't understand songs unless you can read poetry well. . . . Keep saying, what do I not yet know about the context? What difference would it make if I understood what the ticket prices were? What difference would it make if I understood what singers had to wear when they sang eighteenth-century opera?[6]

The simultaneous emphasis on musical analysis and cultural context allows Seaton to strike a balance, both in his textbook and in the classroom, between an intellectual history of music that considers external influences on music, and a more technically focused history of musical style centered on "internal changes within the art itself."[7]

3. Douglass Seaton, *Ideas and Styles in the Western Musical Tradition,* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

4. Douglass Seaton, "Teaching Music History: Principles, Problems, and Proposals," in *Vitalizing Music History Teaching,* ed. James R. Briscoe, Monographs & Bibliographies in American Music 20 (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2010), 62–63.

5. Seaton, *Ideas and Styles*, xix and Seaton, "Teaching Music History: Principles, Problems, and Proposals," 63.

6. Interview, p. 204.

7. Seaton, *Ideas and Styles*, xix.

Seaton's approach is conversational. Since conversations are by nature free-flowing, such a pedagogical approach is somewhat improvisatory. One technique he has used successfully is to require students to come to each class period with a written question based on the textbook reading or the music assigned for the day. He then organizes the class for the day around the questions students have submitted.[8] At other times he asks the questions himself, going alphabetically through the roster or up and down the aisles, asking students about the assignment for the day and then reacting to the answers himself or eliciting reactions from other students.[9] The key is to "keep asking yourself more questions and making students ask those questions, and if they don't ask those questions, suggest that they should ask those questions, and ask them what other questions they can think of, and just keep pushing."[10]

Seaton explicitly encourages students to disagree with each other, with him, or with assigned readings. He sometimes gives them "readings that are just out-and-out wrong, until they get the idea that maybe the reading is supposed to be something one doesn't take for granted. And then they go at them and say, 'Hey, guess what? I don't think this is right.' When they get to that point, you're there. Part of it is just to ask questions, make students ask questions, make them question each other, tell them to look at this thing and tell you what it really is."[11]

As might be imagined, such intensity and intellectual rigor can be intimidating to students, especially at first. He makes clear to students that his classes are hard because the subject matter is demanding: "It's difficult to talk about music intelligently. It's a whole lot easier to deal with something that isn't primarily expressing itself non-verbally in the first place. So part of it is just to say, 'This is going to be hard. These are the expectations.'"[12]

His high expectations of his students grow out of a conviction that they, like he, should learn from engaging in real musicological scholarship appropriate to their academic level. As he put it in a response to his nomination for The Florida State University Teaching Incentive Award in 1994:

> My teaching stems from a fundamental credo regarding higher education: I believe in the university as a community of scholars. Whether one ranks as full professor or first-year undergraduate, the university is a place to engage in learning, both individually and collectively, and the enterprise is not essentially different for any of us in this community. Our true purpose as a community of scholars should be identified as learning, not teaching. Indeed, I often say that it is nearly impossible to teach anything, and just as

8. Interview, pp. 198–99. Seaton also describes this technique in "Teaching Music History: Principles, Problems, and Proposals," 68.

9. Interview, pp. 196–97.

10. Interview, p. 204.

11. Interview, p. 201.

12. Interview, p. 199.

> impossible to prevent scholars from learning. The faculty's task is to share our scholarship with students and to assist students in their scholarship.[13]

This means that one relates to students in the classroom as fellow-scholars. They must receive respect as scholars whose ideas are as legitimate and as subject to intellectual interrogation as any other's. They must also meet the same kinds of expectations as other scholars—that they master the content of a discipline, engage its issues, and accept the challenge of expanding knowledge and understanding by taking on new and ever-deeper questions.

An Interview with Douglass Seaton

Timothy Watkins: You've spent almost your entire career teaching at The Florida State University. How has your teaching changed over the course of your career?
Douglass Seaton: I'm not sure. I think it has changed only in the sense that my own thinking changes. Except for the first year, which was sort of odd because they didn't know what to do with me here, I don't think I've done anything really different. My classes run pretty much the same way; the material changes a bit, but I still think it's all about dialogue. I get to choose the syllabus, and I get to make the assignments, and the responses come from the implicit or explicit question: "What do you think, and let's talk about that?" I don't think that has changed at all over the last thirty-five years.

Obviously technology in the classroom has changed. I went back and looked at the sheet on which I used to evaluate graduate assistants' teaching, or faculty, and I had a little place to comment on handouts. We don't have handouts any more. Everything is either made available for students online beforehand, and they bring it to class with them, or it is on the screen, and they can see it. But except for the technological stuff, I don't think I do anything all that differently from the way I always did. Somebody else would probably say, "Well, this has changed and that has changed," but I don't see it.

The enterprise seems to be the same enterprise. I want to have conversations with students about music. I don't think I lecture more or lecture less. I don't divide the class up into little discussion groups and let them work on projects together. I get up in front of the room and try to moderate a discussion and keep throwing hard questions.

TW: What kinds of things do you do to facilitate that dialogue—to encourage students to come prepared to engage in their side of the conversation?
DS: Well, give students material to prepare and then try to embarrass them when they're not prepared. At the beginning of the semester particularly, I'll go

13. Douglass Seaton, e-mail to author, July 26, 2013.

alphabetically through the roster or up and down the aisles and just ask them to tell me what they read or ask them a question. And they can be prepared. But of course for them every new day is a new idea.

This is a little bit like what some people call a "flipped classroom": *you* go home and *you* study this material, and then come back and we'll talk about the problems or the ideas. It's not, "I'm going to tell you a lot of stuff and then you go home and answer the quiz, do the homework." Last fall I was listening to a discussion at a NASM [National Association of Schools of Music] meeting about flipped classrooms, and I thought, that's what is always supposed to happen. I make the assignment, students go do it, and then they come back and we'll fuss with it: find out that the assigned article is wrong-headed, or introduce a new idea, or whatever.

TW: Throughout your career you've taught the entire range of levels of students from general introductory courses for non-music majors (the infamous "music appreciation" classes) to sophomore-level music literature, and the music history sequence, to upper-level period classes, to graduate seminars. Would you say that your approach is fundamentally similar between all of those different levels and types of students, or are there differences in your approach?
DS: Well, for all the music majors, it's just a matter of what the assignments are. I ask different kinds of questions for sophomores and doctoral students, but the basic pedagogical idea is essentially the same: confront students with some material, and then let them come and puzzle over it and figure out what's new in it.

That is not quite the same for the non-major. I haven't really taught non-majors recently—except that I spent my last research leave teaching the non-majors course, because we were short-handed at the time, and that really was a bit different. In that case I brought in a new performer every day, and we had a performance and then a conversation—basically a kind of dialogue between me and the performer and then between the performer and the class. I don't do that with a doctoral seminar or even with the sophomore music majors.

TW: How did you organize that class?
DS: I let it run depending on which performers signed up for each day. Of course, I certainly would not have wanted to do this when I was just starting out.

TW: What kinds of performers did you have?
DS: We had Frank Kowalsky come and play Stravinsky and end up talking about the difference between A clarinets and B-flat clarinets,[14] we had a sophomore violin performance major come in and play a brilliant Fritz Kreisler piece, we

14. Kowalsky, who retired in 2013, was Joseph A. White Professor of Clarinet at The Florida State University.

had the men's glee club. It was whatever I got. I sent out a request to all of the performance faculty and said, "I would really like to have this course built around performers," and I was overwhelmed with volunteers. So I set up a schedule according to when who could come, and then I made it my business to be a little bit informed and relied on thirty years of teaching music history, and being a musician, and tried to ask intelligent questions. Mostly, of course, the guest performers talked. You know, some things worked to get a lot of response out of the students—the Berio *Sequenza V* for solo trombone is a pretty easy-to-talk-about piece, but we had a faculty cello and piano performance, and the students wanted to know why the cellist closed his eyes when he played, and he said he didn't know he did! I think it was because he could hear better that way. And then they asked him when his instrument was built, and he said it was from the early eighteenth century, so then we're learning about the history of string instruments. We just went where the conversation went, and it was kind of fun. I don't know that I would ask just any graduate teaching assistant to teach that course. . . .

TW: That would take not just considerable background knowledge on the part of the teacher, but the ability to improvise in the classroom.
DS: Well, yes.

TW: It seems to me that your pedagogical approach in general is . . .
DS: Improvisatory.

TW: Somewhat improvisatory.
DS: Yes, I have some idea of what things I want to be sure we cover, but I don't care how we get there. With the sophomore music lit classes certainly it's a lot about skills, and we have to do certain kinds of things, but I don't mind if we get out of order and students ask odd questions. Like one from this morning: "What is the language of 'Kalenda Maya?' It looks sort of like Spanish to me." And someone, without being prompted, noticed that the Kyrie example was melismatic and "Kalenda Maya" was syllabic, and we were off on that, and that worked fine—we managed in an hour and ten minutes to cover what we needed to cover, but it was very improvisatory.

TW: One of the techniques you use is to ask every student every day to walk into class with a written question based on the reading or on the piece assigned for that day and then, apparently with no outline or notes in your hand or on the desk, just organize the class around the questions that the students ask, which appears to be entirely improvisatory.

DS: Well, yes, but that's partly an illusion, of course. What I do is decide what questions are going to support the central points and then arrange them in the order I think will work best. In some sense it's a little risky and a little improvisatory, but mostly it's a matter of letting students get engaged, and then going from there.

TW: If you don't think your own teaching has changed that much, have you noticed any trends or changes in the nature of students over the course of your career?
DS: Oh, yes. Over the past thirty-five years the students are much less prepared in terms of writing and articulate conversation, and they are not as used to doing what I'm expecting from them. They seem to wish that it was easier, and I don't think I noticed that so much when I was first teaching. Maybe I'm asking for more than I used to, I don't know, but I think students wish it was easier. And this is really just in the last five or ten years. Students keep saying—at the end of the course, "The expectations of this course were not clear to me." And I finally realized that they mean, "This course was harder than I thought it was going to be." Not that they weren't told they had to do this, this, and this, but the level of the expectation is harder than they wanted it to be.

TW: So how do you deal with that?
DS: Sometimes I just tell them this is going to be a hard course. We're talking about music, for goodness sake, and it's difficult to talk about music intelligently. It's a whole lot easier to deal with something that isn't primarily expressing itself non-verbally in the first place. So part of it is just to say, "This is going to be hard. These are the expectations." It doesn't necessarily sink in when I do that on the first day, but I spend a lot more time trying to make students be articulate and write effectively, and so on. It just takes a lot more time than it used to.

TW: You've already touched on a number of things that your former students frequently mention as things they value greatly about your teaching; I wonder if you could elaborate on them a little more. The first is the ability to set and to maintain high standards, both for yourself as well as for your students.
DS: Well, it just seems to me that unless you're asking harder questions, you're not going anywhere. That, for me, means that I never quite teach the same thing the same way twice; that ideas that I have get sharper and clearer as we go along, or I get new ones and correct old ones. I take on new repertoire, because it's just a challenge. As far as student standards, I sort of have the idea that those are always the same. You just hold them up and insist on them. I'm just stubborn enough, I think, that there's nothing to do but insist. And I find that in fact students actually do get there. I'm not having a lot of students that I feel

are coming out weaker than their predecessors. I think they're coming in a bit weaker in some ways. Now, in some ways I think they come in very strong here. I mean, for example, in terms of the performance abilities of music majors here, that's gone up over the past thirty-five years—we just have better players. But it's in the way in which they deal with speaking, writing, reading, digging in and understanding music that they haven't come up, that I think they've gone down a bit. But I'm trying to get them out at the same level I've always gotten them out. And I think they're there. I don't think I'm making the standards any easier, I don't really think I'm making them any harder.

Many years ago, when I wrote a statement in response to a nomination for one of my first teaching awards, I emphasized that I always started with the premise that all of us at the university are scholars.[15] We're just at different stages. I expect students to behave as scholars, and I try to treat them as, in some sense at least, junior colleagues. That has to be the standard for them. That's really one of my core premises for my work.

TW: What are some of your other core premises about teaching?
DS: I'm more and more convinced that we have to remember always that teaching by itself can't really exist. You can't walk into a classroom and teach, because you never accomplish it unless someone else is learning, and no matter what you do, if they're not, you haven't done it. If students do learn, it doesn't necessarily mean you taught them anything, but if they don't learn, it means that you haven't taught them, despite whatever slick pedagogical tricks you've performed.

TW: It's hard to evaluate that in a faculty report.
DS: I do think the proper people to evaluate faculty teaching are alumni—not students, because the students don't have enough perspective. And I think that works both ways: I think there are people who students think are great teachers when they are studying with them, but later on they realize they weren't; and there are people who were really good teachers but the students didn't know it and they figure it out later. And favorite teachers are not necessarily good teachers.

TW: It sounds like what you're talking about is the importance of critical thinking. That's always an interesting thing pedagogically: how does one teach critical thinking to students who are not familiar with it, don't know how to do it and/or are resistant to it?
DS: Well, that's one of the ways in which I think one does get improvisatory. One way is to encourage students to ask questions, and make them, if they

15. This is a reference to the 1994 Teaching Incentive Award from The Florida State University. The text of the relevant section of Seaton's response to the nomination is given on pp. 195–96, *supra*.

don't. One way is to ask them to disagree with each other or with you. Give them readings that are just out-and-out wrong, until they get the idea that maybe the reading is supposed to be something one doesn't take for granted. And then they go at them and say, "Hey, guess what? I don't think this is right." When they get to that point, you're there. Part of it is just to ask questions, make students ask questions, make them question each other, tell them to look at this thing and tell you what it really is.

TW: One of the other things that your students frequently mention that is related to what we have been talking about is the stress on careful thinking and good writing, and the link between those two. Could you talk about that?
DS: Well, carefulness is carefulness, and as a habit it's going to affect your thinking and your writing, if you just become a careful person (or if you start out as a careful person, which is also cool). It has to do with being self-critical. You think carefully when you don't take for granted that your first thought is right, and you write better when you don't take for granted that the sentence that you have in front of you is perfect, or the paragraph is coherent. So those things do tie together, and I think it's really just a matter of not being easily satisfied. One of the problems, obviously, is that students are likely to be too easily satisfied, especially if you're teaching undergraduate music majors, most of whom are not music history majors. After all, this is usually not the most important thing in their life. So, you're partly teaching them music history, and I suppose you're partly teaching them other good habits like careful thinking and careful writing. But in order to do that, you have to put a certain amount of pressure on them to make it a higher priority than they would make it themselves. I'm mean—when you come right down to it, I'm a meanie.

TW: I've heard that about you. . . .
DS: I'm sure you have—frequently! "Intimidating" they say. I actually think I'm sort of a pussycat, but . . . It really comes down to giving the students the idea that they can do better than they think they can.

TW: From a pedagogical point of view, the attempt to be clear sometimes results in oversimplification of historical concepts to the point of meaninglessness.
DS: Or even out-and-out falsehood. Yes, it's a real problem. To be clear, to make ideas clear in history—clear to people who really know very little, who are not bringing a huge wealth of knowledge of repertoire, or knowledge of history, or languages, or literature, or haven't got a clue what is in the Bible—you can't do what some music history textbooks do and tell students everything, because you don't have time. From my point of view, given what we have to accomplish, you just can't tell them everything. I could not stop today and talk all about the

history of the troubadours with my sophomore music literature class. I needed to get them through how to apply style analysis to a twelfth-century song. And so I'm sure that at times I oversimplified. I can't think of a really good example in this class, but there have been times when I've said, "You know, you're going to get that when you come back in your junior music history survey. Hold that thought, keep that question, and make your music history teacher answer that question when you have more context. I am not going to explain the whole Mass, I'm going to tell you that the Kyrie is the first part of the Mass Ordinary, and now we're done for today." And I'm sure that students could walk away from that with all kinds of oversimplified misconceptions.

I don't think I told them anything that was false, but I gave them the bare minimum of context to accomplish what we needed to accomplish today. They needed to know what the text is about. It's a Kyrie eleison—it wasn't very difficult to get them to talk about that. But then I was going to talk to them about how singers can make decisions about dynamics and tempo in this piece. I wasn't going to give them all the details about when the Kyrie got into the Mass, and why it's in Greek, much less about tropes. They discovered that it cadenced on G, and I told them that this was a modal piece on G, there's no F-sharp in it, and it was classified as mode 8, and that's what the little 8 at the beginning of the score means, but don't ask me to tell you how the modes are numbered, because you'll get that next semester in music history. I did not talk to them today about the reciting tone on C and the final G, and so on; I didn't explain the modes that way. I made them sing it, and they all wanted to sing an F-sharp, but they learned that wasn't how this music worked.

TW: They wanted to sing an F-sharp because it's in their ear.
DS: Because it's in their ear, and when you have a piece that's starting to orient itself toward E and the phrase ends E-F-G, you instinctively sing *musica ficta*, for goodness sake. Even if you're a sophomore at Florida State in 2013. So, they learned, wow, this music doesn't have a leading tone, and that was enough for today.

TW: But of course, that happens at every level.
DS: Oh, sure. Well, you hope you don't oversimplify in a doctoral seminar. You hope you just leave questions open and you confess your own lack of knowledge and leave the mysteries, and send the students off to do more work. But I think there are times even in a graduate-level nineteenth-century course when you don't tell students everything—and you can't. So you sort of have to reconcile yourself to that, I think. One thing that helps is if students don't really think that you're giving them the total gospel truth every time you open your mouth. If they know that some things are only things that you think, and they know you're not telling them all the details—you *tell* them you're not telling them all

the details, and that there is much more to learn—well that's the most important first thing. If you don't get these oversimplifications to be clear, and if you leave students with the idea that you have the whole truth out there, then you have a problem. If you leave them with the idea that nothing is ever the whole truth, then that's ok—that's good.

TW: That is related to another issue: the ability to choose and then synthesize important historical facts, trends, concepts into a coherent narrative.
DS: It is. Because there is always more to learn, your narrative is always partial. You're arranging and interpreting the things you know in order to make your narrative. You don't know all of the repertoire in the world; you don't know all the historical contexts in the world. How many times do you have to read Goethe's *Faust* before you think you know what you're talking about? How many times do you go back and dig out the historical context and try to figure out what kinds of instruments were being played and how many musicians were in the orchestra, and read the treatises on performance practice, and try to create a narrative that makes sense, that you can believe in? You always have to keep in mind that you don't know everything.

But the other thing is that your narrative needs to include everything that you can bring to it—you need to feel confident that you've brought enough, that you've got the right things, that you're not suppressing something. Your narrative is going to be your narrative, one hopes, not because you're skewing the evidence, but because you're able to make a sufficiently complex narrative. Or write your narrative sufficiently broadly to encourage complexity within it. And you just keep trying.

TW: You are well known for emphasizing the firm grounding of music in intellectual and cultural history. Could you speak to that? You said a moment ago, for example, that students seem to arrive at college with a much more tenuous grasp of literature, of history, of the Bible, of everything.
DS: Yes, Shakespeare, art; they bring very little science, even. There's nothing that at some point doesn't run into music. And music runs into everything else. In music history contexts are always complicated. Music is part of culture, it's part of intellectual history, and music historians, musicologists, ought not to be licensed if they don't really make that the primary thing. You owe it to the music and you owe it to the people who make music to understand them. Otherwise, you could crawl into a little corner and do whatever solipsistic thing you want and make the music mean whatever you wish. Sometimes I see people who seem to be doing that—forcing meanings on music. One way to do that is to ignore the context, to try to take it out of context. There's so much interesting context, though, that you don't really have to make up other meanings for

music. Music has so many meanings, and the meanings are so complicated and have so much depth, that you don't have to make up stuff, you just have to dig harder—make your own knowledge broader.

And that goes for students, too—they need to be told to read Shakespeare, they need to be told to remember the Franco-Prussian War or the Spanish-American War. You don't understand music in the 1780s in Vienna unless you know something about Joseph II. You don't understand songs unless you can read poetry well. It's just vital and there's no point in doing it unless you're going to *do* it. Keep saying, what do I not yet know about the context? What difference would it make if I understood what the ticket prices were? What difference would it make if I understood what singers had to wear when they sang eighteenth-century opera? Or presumably anything—keep asking yourself more questions and making students ask those questions, and if they don't ask those questions, suggest that they should ask those questions, and ask them what other questions they can think of, and just keep pushing.

I think the job is to understand other people. And I think it's a moral issue—that if we're studying music history, we ought to be doing it with the idea of understanding other people, getting to know them as well as we can. I don't think your obligation to understand other people ever runs out because you ran out of time. On the other hand, as I say, at some point you have to help your students pursue a story. The only thing you can do is make sure they understand that you're not telling them the whole story, and you never will.

TW: You've mentioned music and meaning several times—the meaning of music. If there is one thing that anyone comes out of your classroom thinking deeply about, it is what music expresses and how it expresses it—what music means and how it means it. But it's not to be taken for granted these days that music means anything.

DS: It depends what you mean by that. The idea that music doesn't mean anything is an idea about music and meaning that is still worth pursuing. What is it about the music that lets anyone think such a thing? There are composers who say, "My music doesn't mean anything," right? That's a pretty meaningful kind of statement. It tells you a lot—it tells you a lot about a certain kind of Western modernism, but I'm not going to let them get away with it. I'm just not willing to let someone get away with that without interrogating it: either how the music tries to be meaningless, and what it means to say "My music doesn't mean anything," and what they're really trying to say, and what they might not really be trying to say. So I would just go after it. If it's not meaningful, it's not music. This is one of the first things that would come out of my first talk with the sophomores: what is music? If you're not treating it as meaningful, then

you're not treating it as music, and you might as well wrap it up and do something else—find some other music or something.
TW: Because music is art?
DS: Because music is art, and if it's art, it is meaningful. And if it's not art, it's not music. It's just—some stuff.

TW: In a way, your textbook is organized around questions of meaning: how the ways of expressing musical meanings change over the history of western culture.
DS: That's why it's called *Ideas and Styles*—because ideas affect style, and style expresses ideas. The textbook is really about ways in which cultural units—they're historical units, and they're also geographical, obviously—cultures cohere around ideas about how music and ideas, or ideas and styles, relate to each other. The big problem, obviously, is that I'm vulnerable to the criticism that I've got something like a master narrative here—and we don't like master narratives, right? But my master narrative is really the differences between master narratives. This master narrative says that cultures differ, among other things, in the ways in which they understand how music works. And when ideas about music and how it works change, lo and behold, that's a new culture that's cohering around some new central point. If the thing doesn't have its own master narrative, then you haven't got a culture at all. We wouldn't call something a culture if it didn't have values, and ways of understanding things, and practices that it finds valuable for some reason. If it doesn't, then it's not a culture.

So there have to be master narratives. The thing that's interesting is, what are those, how do they change, maybe why do they change, how do they respond to other contexts, how do they influence other contexts, and within them, how much variety do they allow? How much range of different thinking can you do within a cultural context without becoming so incoherent that you are perceived to be insane or somehow too "other" to communicate. So, yes, it really is all about the relationship between music and meaning. And hence the book is about what is the difference between fourteenth-century culture and fifteenth-century culture? What is the difference between eighteenth-century culture and nineteenth-century culture in terms of music and meaning?

TW: Do you have to convince students that music itself actually has meaning?
DS: I don't think I've had that conversation so recently. It's possible that I'm taking it for granted so compellingly that they don't challenge me—I don't know. Sometimes that does come up: "It's just notes—I just want to play the notes." That comes up in the question "Why do I have to take music history anyway? If it's not teaching me to be a better clarinet virtuoso, why do I have to bother?" And at that point I just nail them with my moral issue: "Your job is

to understand other people. Your job is to help other people understand each other—your listeners and your composers. If you're not doing that, you're a lost cause." Usually that ends the conversation; they say, "Oh, well, yeah, I didn't mean that." But I don't have that conversation very often, and I don't usually have it in quite those blatant terms. It's usually "Don't you think that life would be richer . . . ?"

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, when I first wrote *Ideas and Styles*—it would have been 1988 when I first put it down on paper and sent it off to make the Xeroxed copies that my students used for the first couple of years—it was because I thought, What would I really want students to know? What would I really like to say to them that would give them enough of a framework for what I was talking about that then I could go after details and put things in perspective? So I started to write perspective, so that's why the book is short, and that is why it oversimplifies.

TW: What do you mean by "perspective?"
DS: Well, I wanted students to understand that the concept of order became really important in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and it has to do with mathematical order, and the order of the universe, and it has to do with *ordo* in music, and it has to do with coordinating harmony in polyphonic textures, and numbers, and learning to count rhythms, and then we can talk about this piece or that piece, or we can talk about notation, and so on. So I started out to say, "What are the simplest, most important things that I can put in front of students," because I was tired of using a textbook in which I had to teach them what not to read, not because it was wrong, but because it was too distracting—you don't need that "stuff." So I'm going to give you information, and you can deal with that, but you don't need to remember the dates of the various Brahms symphonies in a list. And so the book is supposed to be broad, and it's supposed to be conceptual, and it's supposed to illustrate itself selectively, without trying to be comprehensive.

That's why, when I look at other textbooks that I think try to teach too much "stuff," which the students aren't going to retain anyway, that's not what I think is interesting. So when I decided to write a book that wasn't "stuff," that's what I did. And yes, Benjamin Britten doesn't appear in it, and I'm really sorry, but Carl Nielsen doesn't appear in it either, and one could go on forever.

When I wrote the latest version of the preface for the textbook, I started with the statement that "this book is not a textbook." And the marketing folks at Oxford University Press said, "You can't say that—we won't be able to sell the book!" And I thought, "That's how I *want* you to sell the book!" And the best thing is to hear that people actually read the book because it's interesting to read, because the ideas are interesting, and because they're not stumbling over

too much "stuff." I just wanted to write a book that readers would find interesting to read. It's got a little too much musical technical material for complete non-musicians in it—you have to be able to read a little bit of music notation, for one thing—but I wanted students to read a book that was like a book, partly because I thought they weren't actually reading books that were books. Not only were they not reading great books, they weren't reading any books. They didn't really know how to read a book, and the previous textbook wasn't helping them. The only thing the textbook—a sort of traditional bad example of a textbook—would do was convince them that they *never* wanted to read a book. So *Ideas and Styles* was my solution.

TW: So in terms of what music means and how it means it: numbers, proportion, organization in the Middle Ages. . . .
DS: As can be seen in the isorhythmic motet.

TW: And in the fifteenth century things change. How do things change?
DS: Well, suddenly—suddenly—you move music out of the *quadrivium* into the humanities. You're in a different culture there—where music belongs to a different part of the intellectual framework. And now, it's in there with literature and history. The fifteenth century invented the term "humanities" and put music there. And lo and behold, you're in a different culture and music is going to mean things differently. Music is starting to mean things like poetry does and not like mathematics does. Not that texts make no difference in the Middle Ages, and not that numbers make no difference in the Renaissance, but the way in which we approach what meaning is, is different.

And you can go right on through music history, where the literary basis changes over the next five hundred years, but it's always a literary basis from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth century. Through all those centuries we always believe that music works like words. By the time we get into the seventeenth century it's all about rhetoric. By the time we get into the nineteenth century, it's all about drama, and maybe about narrative. And so Wagner belongs with the Renaissance.

The twentieth century, well, the twentieth century goes to pieces, of course, but you get these people—composers—who think, or claim they think, that music doesn't work like words. It's not "expressive," Stravinsky would try to say. He didn't say "inexpressive"—doesn't try to express stuff—but he's thinking that it's not expressing what it used to express. And that's what culture is about.

TW: So you would see teaching the history of music as teaching the changes in what people believed that music expresses, whatever it is that music expresses.
DS: Yes, absolutely.

TW: Tell me about how your own teachers have affected your pedagogy.
DS: A lot of my teaching really does come out of the teachers that I had. The very first one I had was my mother. I started school at home, with Calvert,[16] and I think my idea that the way in which you learn is you get the assignment, you go and study it, and then you come back, started all the way back there. But I was very lucky in high school to have teachers like that, too—who weren't lecturers, who really did expect reading, who made students responsible for the material and then challenged their thinking. I had this wonderful British world history teacher, Dr. Nora Mitchell, when I was in high school. She was really good at making the conversation in the classroom work. At the time I wasn't thinking about teaching history; I wasn't thinking about teaching, actually. But I had a lot of other teachers like that, too. My fourth-year high school math teacher was like that, and I had religion teachers like that—who would really make you ask questions, make you answer questions, and think about the morality of things. College was very much the same way. I didn't have any teacher in college who just "fed information." I had interesting and curious music history teachers, but they weren't lecturers. And graduate school was all seminar—we didn't do anything except seminar format, so it did put the burden on the student. It did mean that ideas could come from anywhere. We were never done.

Christoph Wolff—I thought Christoph was just a fabulous teacher, largely because he brought in so much knowledge. He would sit with a little piece of graph paper (probably 5" x 7"), on which he had jotted a few words, and that was his notes for the day. I sat immediately on the right hand of his end of the table, so I could see that he had only a few little notes in his very tiny neat hand on neat graph paper. And then we would talk about Bach's *Art of Fugue* or Mozart concertos, and editing them, and compositional process, and performance practice, and whatever came up. I've always wished I could be that kind of teacher, who could have minimal notes, bring lots of knowledge, be able to respond at the moment, and make something at the end that students find coherent. Or if they don't think it's coherent, you've equipped them to go home and make some coherence out of it, or even just to be confused if necessary.

16. "Calvert" refers to the home schooling curriculum published by Calvert School, a coeducational lower and middle school day school in Baltimore, Maryland. Seaton's parents, Presbyterian missionaries in India, used Calvert's curriculum for his early education.

APPENDIX: A Select Bibliography of Douglass Seaton

The following bibliography is organized by (1) monographs and scholarly editions of music including research guides, (2) articles and book chapters on historical subjects including Mendelssohn, art song, and J. S. Bach, and (3) writings and presentations on music history pedagogy.

Monographs and Scholarly Editions

The Mendelsohn Companion. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001.

The Art Song: A Research and Information Guide. New York: Garland, 1987.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, *Elias/Elijah*. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2009.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, *Lobgesang (Symphony No. 2)*. Stuttgart: Carus, 1990.

Articles and Book Chapters

"One More Time: The Case for the Second-Part Repetition in Classic Sonata Form." In "*Hands-On*" *Musicology: Essays in Honor of Jeffery Kite-Powell*, edited by Allen Scott, 318–29. Ann Arbor: Steglein, 2012.

"Mit Worten: Mendelssohns Lieder." In *Mendelssohn-Interpretationen—Der unbekannte Mendelssohn: Das Liedschaffen*, edited by Dominik Sackmann, 11–52. Zürcher Musikstudien 7. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011.

"Topos as Aesthetic Basis in Mendelssohnian Song." In *Mendelssohn-Interpretationen—Der unbekannte Mendelssohn: Das Liedschaffen*, edited by Dominik Sackmann, 125–39. Zürcher Musikstudien 7. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011.

"Mendelssohn in 1825: A 'Snapshot' with Two Canons." *Journal of Musicological Research* 29, no. 2, Special Mendelssohn Issue (April-June 2010): 159–70.

"Narrativity and the Performance of Beethoven's 'Tempest Sonata.'" In *Beethoven's* Tempest *Sonata: Perspectives of Analysis and Performance*, edited by Pieter Bergé, co-edited by Jeroen D'hoe and William Caplin, 273–92. Analysis in Context: Leuven Studies in Musicology 2. Leuven: Peeters, 2009.

"Mendelssohn's Audience." In *Mendelssohn Performance Studies*, edited by Siegwart Reichwald, 1–18. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

"Back from B-A-C-H: Schumann's C-major Symphony." In *About Bach* (Essays in Honor of Christoph Wolff), edited by Gregory Butler, Mary Green, and George Stauffer, 191–206. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

"Narrative in Music: The Case of Beethoven's 'Tempest Sonata.'" In *Narrative Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality, Disciplinarity*, edited by Jan Christoph

Meister in cooperation with Tom Kindt and Wilhelm Schernus, 65–81. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005.

"Symphony and Overture." In *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, edited by Peter Mercer-Taylor, 91–111. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

"The Cycles of Mendelssohn's Songs." In *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*, edited by John Michael Cooper, 202–29. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

"The Problem of the Lyric Persona in Mendelssohn's Songs." In *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Kongreß-Bericht Berlin 1994*, edited by Christian Martin Schmidt, 167–86. Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1997.

"Shakespeare's 'It was a lover and his lass': The Authentic Music and Its Performance." *Ars LYRICA* 8 (1994): 93–104.

"Interpreting Schubert's Heine Songs." *The Music Review* 53, no. 2 (May 1992): 85–99.

"Mozart as a Reader of Poetry: A Reconsideration of His Song." *Ars LYRICA* 3 (1986): 1–22.

"The Romantic Mendelssohn: The Composition of *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*." *The Musical Quarterly* 68 (1982): 398–410.

"A Composition Course with Karl Friedrich Zelter." *College Music Symposium* 21 (1981): 126–38.

"A Draft for the Exposition of the First Movement of Mendelssohn's 'Scotch' Symphony." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 30 (1977): 129–35.

"Bach's 'Art of Fugue': An Examination of the Sources—The Autograph: An Early Version of the 'Art of Fugue.'" *Current Musicology* 19 (1975): 54–59.

Writings and Presentations on Music History Pedagogy

"Core Music Curriculum Components II: History and Repertory—A Survey and Some Questions." In *National Associations of Schools of Music Proceedings: The 87th Annual Meeting 2011*, pp. 23–26. Reston, VA: National Association of Schools of Music, 2012.

"Teaching Music History: Principles, Problems, and Proposals." In *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, edited by James R. Briscoe, 59–72. Monographs & Bibliographies in American Music 20. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2010.

"Imagination, Learning, and Music in Higher Education." Inaugural Music Teaching Colloquium, Department of Music, Valdosta State University, March 26, 1999.

"Music in American Higher Education." Missoula: National Association of Schools of Music and The College Music Society, 1998.

"The Pedagogy of Music History." Panel presentation at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Southern Chapter, Tuscaloosa, AL, February 21, 1997.

"Teaching Music History: Principles, Problems, and Proposals." Annual meeting of The College Music Society, Great Plains Chapter, March 16, 1996.

"Teaching a Broadly Based European Music History Course." Panel presentation at the joint Annual Meeting of The College Music Society and the Association for Technology in Music Instruction, Savannah, GA, October 21, 1994.

"New Perspectives on Music History." Annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Southern Chapter, Hattiesburg, MS, February 23, 1991.

"Toward a Conceptual Framework for the Western Musical Tradition." Keynote address at the annual meeting of The College Music Society, Great Plains Chapter, 17 March 1990 and keynote address at joint annual meeting of the American Musicological Society and The College Music Society, Pacific Northwest Chapters, April 13, 1991.

"College, Canon, Curriculum." Forum on "Perspectives on the Canon: Cultural Diversity and the Humanistic Tradition." Goshen College, Goshen, IN, November 29, 1990.

"The Undergraduate Music Curriculum of the 21st Century." Panel presentation at joint annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Allegheny Chapter, and The College Music Society, Mid-Atlantic Chapter, April 1988.