

Playing by Ear: Listening Games in the Music History Classroom

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The principle of games in the classroom has recently gained traction in pedagogical circles. Scholarship of the past ten years, building on the work of James Paul Gee, makes the case that video games in particular can provide a model for learning, given their interactive virtual world in which players can develop expertise.¹ José Antonio Bowen argues that designing the classroom like a video game helps challenge students while maintaining enjoyable engagement.² More specifically, quality games offer customization at different levels, encourage risk-taking, help students develop competence through performance, and allow for lateral thinking, among other benefits.³ Indeed, the recent pedagogical interest in video games seems to have overshadowed the basic concept of play in the classroom.

In terms of classroom games, instituting them as a non-graded dimension helps engage students without creating anxiety, while the element of an unknown outcome also offers excitement—or, as Ellen J. Langer writes, “What makes the activity enjoyable is the process of going from not knowing to knowing.”⁴ Indeed, much of the appeal in games lies in their promise of fun without the worry of failure. Perhaps most importantly, psychological studies have shown that the very act of introducing the play element into activities encourages mindful learning on the part of participants.⁵ Langer and Sophia Snow devised an experiment asking participants to complete various activities involving comic strips (ordering or categorizing them, changing words, etc.), and later asked them to evaluate their own engagement. They concluded that

1. James Paul Gee, *Good Video Games and Good Learning: Collected Essays on Video Games, Literacy, and Learning* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

2. José Antonio Bowen, *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology Out of Your College Classroom Will Improve Student Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

3. Bowen, *Teaching Naked*, 59–61.

4. Ellen J. Langer, *The Power of Mindful Learning* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 59.

5. Langer, *Power of Mindful Learning*. In a chapter on “The Myth of Delayed Gratification,” she argues based on a number of experiments that framing work activities with mindful directions can increase pleasure and therefore encourage learning; see pages 59–65.

for the “two more difficult tasks, more participants enjoyed the tasks when they were presented as play than when they were presented as work [Their] minds wandered twice as often in the ‘work’ as in the ‘play’ groups.”⁶ In the context of the college classroom, the very framing of activities as games can predispose students toward more effective learning.

In my own experience teaching at a conservatory, I discovered students could benefit from further development of critical listening skills, so I devised listening games to help them become more engaged in this area. These games involve listening to multiple short selections of music and identifying some aspect among them. There are two broad categories of listening games: content-based games, which include different musical selections intended to help students hear a particular musical element, and performance-based games that produce more subjective reactions to different performances of the same musical excerpt. A typical content-based game might be designed for questions such as: Which musical selections include a ground bass? Which selections include a Classical sentence phrase structure? In contrast, questions for a performance-based game might focus on students’ interpretations of perceived expressive nuances: Which performance of Schumann’s “Coquette” is most flirtatious? Which performance of a Chopin étude seems more virtuosic?

This article argues for the incorporation of such listening games into the music history classroom, in which students may encounter styles or specific musical elements primarily through isolated examples. The article is structured in two parts, reflecting the two main types of games I use in class: (1) content-focused musical games and (2) performance-focused games. Indeed, performance, as highlighted in a recent roundtable in this *Journal*, may be undervalued in the music history classroom, and such listening games can help transform it into a central point of discussion.⁷ Building on recent pedagogical theories of games and attention, I propose that we consider incorporating more games into music history classes to foster active learning and critical listening. Through examples, I also offer game variants to demonstrate the possibilities of such incorporation within multiple contexts.

Content-Based Listening Games

I teach at a conservatory where performance is highly valued and where most students come to my class with a variety of experiences involving music, theater, or dance. Music performance majors may compare interpretations in

6. Langer, *Power of Mindful Learning*, 58–9.

7. Daniel Barolsky, Sara Gross Ceballos, Rebecca Plack, and Steven M. Whiting, “Roundtable: Performance as a Master Narrative in Music History,” this *Journal* 3, no. 1 (2012): 77–102, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/79/103>.

studio class and concert hall; therapists focus on the physical and psychological effects of active music making; and recording production and technology majors might center their studies on the process of manipulating recorded performance. These students take history surveys together, bringing a range of backgrounds and experiences with them. While they are often exposed to performance, they may not have considered the historical contexts and ideological bases of performances, or the evaluation thereof. Having used different versions of listening games this past year in both undergraduate surveys and graduate seminars, I can attest that students enjoy playing the games and find them helpful to the development of critical listening skills. Like any interactive learning tool, the games break up lectures and stimulate participation and active learning.

The basic principles behind listening games in the classroom are active learning and the use of technology to facilitate it in an engaging way. Current pedagogical theories emphasize that active learning increases students' understanding of material. There are many ways to incorporate active learning and thereby critical thinking into the classroom, but how can we as music teachers encourage more critical listening? Listening games have offered one solution to the problem, as they involve what Bloom's cognitive taxonomy terms higher-level engagement, by promoting application of terms and evaluation of unfamiliar musical selections and performances.⁸

As my interest in classroom games developed, I began to see significant applications vis-à-vis the music history anthology. The current pedagogy of music history surveys, with its emphasis on the score anthology as a primary teaching tool, can invite discussion of different performances and the history of performance; nonetheless, the emphasis on scores may initially seem contrary to this notion. However, an anthology can be presented as a collection of pieces that have been chosen for some reason, either as a representative of a genre, a particular transitional moment in style history, an outstanding exception to the genre, etc. Moreover, the very selection of pieces implies both a value and legitimacy of those pieces—indeed, and of those particular versions of those pieces as well.

We can encourage critical thinking by helping students engage with the concept of the anthology and its creation. For example, Mark Evan Bonds suggests we teach students to “connect the dots” in the score anthology by having them

8. Benjamin S. Bloom, ed. et al., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay, 1956). For a revision, see Lorin W. Anderson et al., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, abridged ed. (New York: Longman, 2001). The taxonomy hierarchizes kinds of learning, from more basic memorization and recall of information to engaged application of material, evaluation of material, and creation.

search for similarities and developments between pieces over time.⁹ In an article on peer learning in the music history classroom, J. Peter Burkholder further describes how students in a music history survey can be challenged to create their own class anthology. This exercise encourages critical thinking as students must consider various parameters for the selection of pieces and work together as a group to make their anthology cohere; my own students have responded well to the project.¹⁰ Similarly, in his article applying the Jigsaw classroom technique to Mass propers, Douglas Shadle makes an eloquent case for the benefits of numerous comparative examples over the course of a semester. He argues that this approach helps to invert the concept of the traditional anthology with more data, and games can provide such an opportunity by introducing students to multiple instances of a musical characteristic or multiple performances of the same work—a larger data set.¹¹

When it comes to listening, we may present formal or stylistic material in a show-and-tell manner: “Listen to this form; follow along with the chart in the anthology.” We may also ask students to identify musical elements and apply relevant terms to what they hear in the example. In contrast, with a listening game, students are asked to compare actively. The question asked is not “Do you hear X element?” (which may invite a yes/no answer, sometimes a passive nod), but rather “How is it presented in these examples? How do musicians A and B perform that element?” This kind of game encourages engaged listening. At the same time, it may be easier for students to hear structural or stylistic elements through the comparison of different performances. As Daniel Barolsky writes, “a comparison can often focus students’ listening more intensely and even draw their attention to larger points.”¹²

Furthermore, the games invite evaluation of different performances or different composers’ approaches to form and style, which in turn seems to empower students through the development of their subjective reactions to music. I support this as well, reassuring students that the point is not whether they like one excerpt or another, but whether they can articulate their opinions from some kind of aesthetic standpoint. Robert C. Lagueux has recently argued that teachers of music history should encourage the honing of students’ affective responses with the analytical tools they learn in class; professors serve

9. Mark Evan Bonds, “Selecting Dots, Connecting Dots: The Score Anthology as History,” this *Journal* 1, no. 2 (2011): 77–91, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/18/30>.

10. For more on this, see J. Peter Burkholder, “Peer Learning in Music History Courses,” in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 205–23.

11. Douglas Shadle, “Nothing Ordinary About It: The Mass Proper as Early Music Jigsaw Puzzle,” this *Journal* 3, no. 1 (2012): 1–37, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/66/98>.

12. Barolsky et al., “Roundtable: Performance as a Master Narrative,” 95.

as models of empathic listeners and help students learn to articulate, or “language,” their own reactions to music.¹³

I try to follow Lagueux’s model in typical applications of content-based games in class. “Let’s play a game!” I announce to my students. Majors and non-majors alike generally perk up at the suggestion. If they have not played one of my listening games before, the mystery of the unknown provides some initial interest, and if they have played before, then they know this activity will focus on active listening. In the following case, I had introduced the concept of the ground bass in the second-semester history survey and knew already from past experience that students had trouble recognizing ground basses by ear. As a harpsichordist, I have no trouble attuning my ears to basslines, but I found that students were more likely to listen to upper voices regardless of whether text was involved; in a class on Baroque music history, where so much attention is devoted to the development of figured bass and its ramifications, this proclivity was a problem. To help students focus on basslines, I created a “ground bass” game, which consists of seven short excerpts from seventeenth-century instrumental music; the goal is simply to identify which of these excerpts contain a ground bass and which do not. For students with more advanced ears, I offered that they could also try to identify the harmonic progressions in the selections.

For classroom application, I had students write down their answers while listening, then we discussed as a group (about fifteen of us). I solicited answers from students; generally a show of hands—“ground bass or no?”—offered me a sense of how many students got it. Some examples were clear, others were not. In those cases we listened again and I helped them parse out the bass line by playing it on the piano to accompany the recording, or in one case, by having students sing along. Students generally enjoyed the sense of mystery and subsequent relief in learning the correct answers for those examples they had found unclear. I often see surprised, engaged reactions in post-game discussion. One could add even more excitement to a game like this by adding a reward incentive: official score-keeping, candy, etc. For larger classes, one could group the students into teams and have them discuss their answers.

Though its immediate goal is relatively simple and objective, the “ground bass” game presents a kind of listening exercise that has applications beyond the initial challenge. In my experience, it has proven to be a successful way to train students to (1) focus on the bass line in ensemble repertoire, (2) recognize the variety of ground bass patterns and their applications in Baroque repertoire, and (3) recognize the context of a very famous ground bass piece: the Pachelbel Canon. For this last point, I chose a historically informed performance by

13. Robert C. Lagueux, “Inverting Bloom’s Taxonomy: The Role of Affective Responses in Teaching and Learning,” this *Journal* 3, no. 2 (2013): 119–50, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/76/118>.

Jordi Savall and the Hespèrion XXI ensemble—an almost perversely fast corrective to the overplayed wedding piece that the work has become.¹⁴ Students were shocked and amused by the performance, and it offered me a teaching moment to situate something they already knew intimately within its historical and generic contexts. Finally, this game is also a way to expand their repertoire—some students demand to know what certain pieces are: in the case of the “ground bass” game, many students were entranced by the performance of Monteverdi’s “Zefiro Torna” by Philippe Jaroussky, Nuria Rial, et al.¹⁵

The “ground bass” game is a perfect example of a content-based listening game, which includes multiple examples of different pieces that illustrate some kind of stylistic or formal element. Thus, the game may be used to reinforce general points from class that are most typically presented through one example at a time. After introducing non-majors to the concept of imitative polyphony, for example, I had them play a game identifying it in openings of various Renaissance vocal pieces. The game may also be used to help students recognize various formal structures even in longer pieces. Indeed, I have found success in teaching sonata form through the listening game. The “Mozart: Theme or Non-Theme” game juxtaposes one- to two-minute selections of Mozart’s music from various genres to help students distinguish between the elements that make a theme or a transitional and/or developmental passage. With so many examples played one after another, students began to “get a feel” for it, in this case learning to recognize the harmonic and phrasal structures of a theme, or sequential passages and harmonic instability as prime characteristics of a transition or development. Naturally, such a listening game could be done with any kind of musical formal element: pedal points, retransitions more broadly, fugal passages, codettas, etc. Upon completing the game, students could even begin to construct a taxonomy of characteristics for one or more elements.

The overall length of a game as well as the length of its individual excerpts can also contribute to the learning outcome. As I have designed it thus far, a typical game includes shorter clips of music, from one to three minutes in length. The concise nature of these excerpts reduces the time needed to play the game, making it manageable to incorporate into the classroom—comparing complete Beethoven symphonies would take hours. Rather than overwhelm students with length, it helps to train their musical memory in a concentrated setting; a series of games could be designed to include progressively longer clips of music, thereby helping students work up to comparing complete performances of substantial works, possibly in conjunction with the teaching of longer forms.

14. *Ostinato*, Jordi Savall et al., Hespèrion XXI (Alia Vox, AV 9820, 2001, compact disc).

15. Claudio Monteverdi, *Teatro d’amore*, Nuria Rial, Philippe Jaroussky, Jan van Elsacker, João Fernandes, Christina Pluhar (Virgin Classics, 5099923614024, 2009, compact disc).

As seen above, content-based listening games may also function as a means of introducing students to a range of repertoire in a short time. One can imagine varying content of the game as a way to help students appreciate a range of compositional styles from even a single composer. The Brahmsian in me wants to create a listening game asking students to identify nineteenth-century genres, then reveal that all selections are by Brahms—I can think of no better way to present the historical context of Wagner’s quip that Brahms was an excellent mask wearer, or, of course, as an introduction to the concept of nineteenth-century historicism more broadly.¹⁶

Further modifications of the game can involve active student participation in group settings. Thus far I have found it most successful as an in-class activity followed by group discussion; in soliciting feedback from students, I found that they much preferred listening and discussing in class because of the immediate explanations and group exchange of ideas. The game would also work well in the context of what Elizabeth F. Barkley et al. call a “think–pair–share” activity, in which students take their own notes and then discuss their reactions together with a partner.¹⁷ Likewise, students working in pairs or small groups could each be assigned different listening roles—i.e., one person listens for articulation, another for dynamics, etc., then each discusses their specialty with the group. A longer-term project might be for students to design their own games; although this activity requires the use of music editing software, which may make it difficult for some teachers to assign, it has the benefit of challenging students to consider their own parameters and variations in performance and musical content.

The Comparative Performance Game

As I initially conceived of it, the content game functioned primarily as a way to introduce students to isolated musical elements as described above. However, the more subjective game focusing on comparing performances began as a project in my spare time, born from the musician’s desire to evaluate different performances, and, moreover, to interrogate my own aesthetic preferences and prejudices. The challenge of the game was initially to identify individual performers or just national schools. My friends and I discovered our own prejudice was against modern piano performance for the sake of older, vintage, Golden Era recordings—the very scratch of the record a mark of pedigree, a glimpse into a supposedly purer past. We listened more closely to vintage recordings to develop an aesthetic instead of a blanket acceptance that anything old was good.

16. Richard Wagner, “On Poetry and Composition,” trans. William Ashton Ellis, in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, vol. 6 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1897), 146.

17. Elizabeth F. Barkley, K. Patricia Cross, and Claire Howell Major, *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 104–7.

In a similar way, the game could be used to challenge those who make sexist or racist comments about performers (i.e., “women are more expressive than men”)—indeed, to challenge the very notion of national schools of performance that still figure prominently in the discourse on classical musical today.¹⁸ A colleague has incorporated listening games into a women’s studies classroom as a means of sparking discussion about the gendered expectations of performance: Using only their aural skills, can students tell the difference between male and female pianists?

Certainly, listening to multiple performances gives students a sense of the variety and color in live music-making. This activity focuses their attention on the work as performance and not as printed document. Just as interrogating the anthology engages students in college-level conceptualization of the teaching of music history by forcing them to recognize that it is not a series of facts, comparison of multiple performances helps them realize that it is also not a series of definitive performances of works. Of course, there are differences in presenting a score anthology as a collection of works and presenting a series of recordings of the same work. The score anthology provides an easy point of reference for discussion and, for some students, it functions as a security blanket for analysis. We may easily direct students to a particular measure number to highlight an element, and they may find the analysis of physical notes to be more objective than discussing something they hear. Furthermore, an anthology of recordings usually corresponds to the discussion in the score anthology, so it may be problematic as well to bring in a recording that differs from what the students learn in the readings (e.g., different timings, a performer taking a repeat or not, varied ornamentation, and so on). At the same time, following along with the perceived “objectivity” of the score while listening may distract students from the nuances of an individual performance; they may focus on the unchanging visual dimensions of listening with a score at the expense of the holistically aural.

When asked about the benefits of comparing recordings, one of my own students brought up a practical danger: “I think it helps the listener be able to hear different renditions of each piece. However, I might would [*sic*] find it confusing for a listening test if I am used to one type of voice or rendition.”¹⁹ This

18. Even though many young performers themselves may disavow the existence of national schools, one may easily see recurring threads of discussion on “Chinese” vs. “Western” or “Russian” pianists, for example, in YouTube commentary. For an example of modern discourse on building a national school, see Eric Hung, “Performing Chineseness on the Western Concert Stage: The Case of Lang Lang,” *Asian Music* 40, no. 1 (2009): 131–48. Hung addresses Lang Lang’s attempts to legitimize Chinese pianism as “Chinese” through the incorporation of folk melodies into his repertoire.

19. This quote is taken from an informal, anonymous feedback survey I administered at the end of one of my music history surveys. The question was “Do you find listening games helpful? Why or why not?”

statement highlights another basic pitfall of listening to one recording from an anthology without critical evaluation: students may associate the music with that particular performance; the timbres and interpretive gestures become the work for them, and it may be difficult to hear the work in other performing contexts. And if a goal in the classroom is to help students learn to identify a body of musical works, then relying on only one recording of a piece can also allow them to “cheat,” in a sense, on listening quizzes by recognizing a piece of music based on a particular performance or recording—for example, “I recognize that voice; this must be the Landini.” In this way, paradoxically, comparing multiple interpretations helps student recognize and separate the common elements of the “music itself” from individual performers’ interpretations. While such comparisons may seem to focus listening only on the nuances of performance, they also help students become more familiar with core elements of the piece and force them to engage with the notion of the mutable work (“To what extent can performances vary before the piece becomes unrecognizable?”). As one student commented after playing the listening games, “Not only did I appreciate the music more, I also feel that it was easier to learn and recognize the piece, as opposed to just listening to one performer and assuming that their performance style is accurate for the time period/genre, etc.”

In addition to providing new ways of hearing assigned pieces, a performance-based listening game can also function as an inroad to discussing performers themselves in the music history classroom. In a recent roundtable in this *Journal*, musicologists theorize the problem of the overlooked performer and offer various solutions to it.²⁰ Their discussion proceeds from the notion that the teaching of music history privileges stylistic and formal developments in music—that music is located, by and large, in the score, where these developments are readily recognizable and tangibly dissectible. Meanwhile, performers who bring that music to life, whose recordings compose anthologies, are often relegated to the margins of music history.

I believe listening is the source from which discussions of performers can spring most fruitfully. If students have little means of recognizing and articulating differences between performances, if they have no understanding of what makes a “great” performance, then it may be harder for them to connect musically with what they hear, and they may have little interest in the history of individual musicians and their performing contexts.²¹ Performances that stand out within the context of many can thus pique students’ interest in the performers themselves. Moreover, unlike some popular YouTube video compilations (“Great Pianists Play . . .”), my classroom games contain no visual com-

20. Barolsky et al., “Roundtable: Performance as a Master Narrative.”

21. Daniel Barolsky’s inclusion of Glenn Gould, Maria Callas, and Wilhelm Furtwängler instead of younger, currently active performers implies some value in their historical legacies.

ponent and no identifying information about the performers. I could introduce students to a famous performer and predispose them to hear the selection influenced by my own opinion, but I prefer them to come to each performance as a discovery event.

For example, in a graduate seminar on music history pedagogy, I asked students to record their reactions to eight different clips of the final two minutes of Chopin's Piano Sonata in B Minor, op. 58, and to try to articulate why one or another seemed to be a "successful" performance to them. In an undergraduate setting I may have given more guidance in the initial presentation of the game, but I expected the DMA performers to have some basis for comparing performances already. Indeed, they had little difficulty concentrating on interpretive differences, although they found the number of examples to be too many. After listening, they enjoyed sharing their opinions and talking amongst themselves, "Why did you like that one?" The big shock of the game was that many of them had enjoyed the performance by Lang Lang, yet they had "heard" he was supposed to be "bad." The discussion eventually led to the group attempting to define aesthetic criteria for a "successful" performance, and, indeed, to reevaluate their preconceived notions about some famous pianists.

The graduate students were also excited about the prospect of using such a game in a studio setting and offered that it could be used in a music class to highlight changes in style between performers of different historical periods. I saw this very principle at work in one of my undergraduate surveys when I asked students to debate which performance of Schumann's "Coquette" from *Carnaval*, op. 9, they found more "flirtatious": Arthur Rubinstein's or Adelina de Lara's—of course, in accordance with my listening policy, I simply presented the two examples as "A" and "B."²² When I later revealed that Adelina de Lara had studied with Clara Schumann, this tidbit of information opened the discussion to how historical performances might lend insight into certain performance traditions. More broadly: What difference does a generation make, or different kinds of training and cultural experiences? These questions could also direct class discussion towards the ideas of tradition and of lineage in performing circles as well. A teacher might further employ such discussions to draw connections between the kinds of legitimization performed by writers of music history and by the musicians themselves. The game offers students

22. See "Pupils of Clara Schumann," disc 3 (Pearl, GEMM CDS 99049 [9904—9904], 1991, compact disc); Robert Schumann, *Carnaval* excerpts, Arthur Rubinstein (RCA Red Seal) in *Norton Recorded Anthology of Western Music*, vol. 2, 6th edition (2010, compact disc). Schumann character pieces are an excellent inroad to discussion because of their short length and because students have the composer's own suggestion for programmatic interpretation to use as a springboard for comparison. Some of the less talkative students in this case spoke up when they realized our comparison centered on the "flirtatious" nature of the performances—that is, program or character music invites students to discuss the performance in descriptive terms.

a fun introduction to these topics, with the historical object—in this case, the musical performance—as the main theme of discussion.

Indeed, a game comparing different performances could be based on any number of parameters, depending on what I would direct students to hear in the selection of music: Is it a particularly hair-raising moment in a larger dramatic work? Is it a selection that showcases a wide range of musical approaches, including delicacy, color, as well as virtuosic *Sturm und Drang*? Is it an improvisatory passage where time-taking is the foremost parameter (for example, I might juxtapose harpsichordists and pianists in the performance of a Baroque toccata)? Will we compare figured bass realizations on various instruments? Differences in orchestration, voice types, and performance forces (Bach sung one-to-a-part, or period versus modern instruments in Beethoven)? Ornamentation in all periods? Can different performances be used to highlight various aspects of the music, such as the dance-like character or improvisatory roots of a genre? The questions I ask in class can also direct students to listen to certain characteristics within the selections as well as to broader questions about performance practice.²³

Students found themselves reexamining their preconceived notions of piano and harpsichord performance in addition to their notions of “romantic” and “Baroque” interpretations in a Baroque survey course recently. Graduate students listened to recordings of an unidentified pianist and then a harpsichordist play the A section of Scarlatti’s Sonata in D Minor, K. 213/L. 108. The goal was to interpret which performer used more “freedom” in playing. The students seemed confident they knew what this term meant; I could have asked them to briefly sketch their criteria for “freedom” in Baroque performance before the game to make them approach it more mindfully. After hearing the pianist’s legato articulation and use of rubato, students were quick to describe it as a “romantic” performance. But they were later surprised by the even greater rhythmic flexibility and space given to shorter musical ideas in a historically informed performance by harpsichordist Ottavio Dantone.²⁴ Part of the enjoyment of this game derived from students creating and reevaluating their own parameters for “freedom” in performance.

As seen in the aforementioned examples, I prefer that my students play without even the names of the musicians, let alone the visual stimuli of the

23. As one example, the questions I wrote for the “Liszt Sonata Game” were: “This two-and-a-half-minute clip is one of the most structurally important and dramatic points in the entire 30-minute sonata. How does each performer create tension and resolution? Which performance(s) do you think is most successful at this? Can you articulate why (is it a matter of dynamics, articulation, timing)? Which performances are less successful? Do they make you hear the passage differently?”

24. Domenico Scarlatti, *Scarlatti Complete Sonatas*, vol. 7, Ottavio Dantone (Stradivarius, SVS 33621-7, 2004, compact disc).

performance. Whether we should listen in this manner is a tricky question in and of itself and warrants some discussion of its benefits and problems. Popular pedagogical methods are often derived from the notion of different learning styles, such as “visual learning,” even if some recent research has suggested that tailoring teaching methods to various “learning styles” is ineffective.²⁵ My own inclination to have students focus on the audio derives from my background having learned to listen primarily from audio recordings. I want even the “visual learners” to confront the challenge of audio-only listening. In the case of music majors, it is an important skill to be able to process and analyze aural information by ear alone—musicians must be able to listen.

Recent research at the intersections of pedagogy and neuroscience supports the notion of isolating the acts of seeing and hearing to improve concentration on each one. Biochemist James E. Zull suggests we avoid asking students to multitask with both audio and visual stimulation. He warns, for example, of showing movies in class:

Learning is enhanced when we develop explanations and predictions from what we perceive We must transform the information we receive into ideas, plans, and actions, making something personal and new from what came through our senses. Taking ownership in this way is essential for learning, but the movie may seduce us into taking the easier route of just watching.²⁶

In other words, Zull seems to be encouraging mindfulness in the classroom. By overstimulating the senses with both audio and visual material, a teacher may reduce students to the point of simply “taking it all in,” as he describes in the case of films. On the other hand, having students focus on one aspect of a performance, with the additional help of asking direct questions about the material, helps them to engage more productively with the information and to take ownership of it. In this way, the comparative listening games help students craft their own evaluations and perceptions from the multiple examples. My preference is for them to focus on training their ears, so I exclude the visual element in many game rounds. As for the problem of showing film in class, Zull suggests a similar solution:

We also can separate the sound from the images to reduce the sensory content in any moment in time. This is highly brain-compatible. Despite all the hype about multitasking, our perception and comprehension are increased when we attend to either the visual or the auditory at any one time.²⁷

25. See review of the literature in Harold Pashler et al., “Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 9, no. 3 (2009): 105–16.

26. James E. Zull, *From Brain to Mind: Using Neuroscience to Guide Change in Education* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2011), 129.

27. Zull, *From Brain to Mind*, 130.

Furthermore, removing the visual aspect of performance can help eliminate bias and other types of distraction.²⁸ Within the fields of music psychology and cognition, the visual element has been shown to play a strong role in the perception of musical performances, beyond simply functioning as a “distraction.”²⁹ For example, a 1990 study by Klaus-Ernst Behne indicated that ninety-three participants could watch different video performances set to the same audio track and believe they were hearing different musical performances.³⁰ A more recent study by Dahl and Friberg suggests that the expressive power of musicians’ bodily movements and gestures can help audience members perceive emotions even without auditory input, and other studies support the notion that the evaluation of performers becomes more positive when listeners see both facial expression and bodily motion.³¹ In the case of percussionists, even the perception of note duration can be affected by visual information such as the length of the performer’s arm gesture.³²

In a similar vein, recent studies have also indicated the presence of an “attractiveness bias” in the evaluation of performers. In a 2004 study, Charlene Ryan and Eugenia Costa-Giomi found that judges’ perception of attractiveness in adolescent pianists affected their ratings of audiovisual performances; the “attractive” female performers rated higher compared to their audio-only recordings, while the “unattractive” males rated higher compared to their audio-only recordings.³³ Studies by Joel Wapnick et al. have also explored the relationship between perceived attractiveness and the evaluation of performance. Reflecting on years of research, they conclude “The visual aspect apparently

28. I often make use of recent performances that do have a video component, which I remove when compiling game rounds. This can easily be done in a program such as Audacity. Alternately, one can simply play a YouTube video without projecting the video to students.

29. For general methods, see Friedrich Platz and Reinhard Kopiez, “When the Eye Listens: A Meta-analysis of How Audio-visual Presentation Enhances the Appreciation of Music Performance,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 30, no. 1 (2012): 71–83.

30. See Klaus-Ernst Behne, “Blicken Sie auf die Pianisten?!”—Zur bildbeeinflussten Beurteilung von Klaviermusik im Fernsehen,” *Medienpsychologie* 2 (1990): 115–31. For an updated study, see Klaus-Ernst Behne and Clemens Wöllner, “Seeing or Hearing the Pianists? A Synopsis of an Early Audiovisual Perception Experiment and a Replication,” *Musicae Scientiæ* 15 (2011): 324–42.

31. Sofia Dahl and Anders Friberg, “Visual Perception of Expressiveness in Musicians’ Body Movements,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 24, no. 5 (2007): 433–54 and Jay Juchniewicz, “The Influence of Physical Movement on the Perception of Musical Performance,” *Psychology of Music* 36 (2008): 417–27.

32. See Michael Schutz and Scott Lipscomb, “Hearing Gestures, Seeing Music: Vision Influences Perceived Tone Duration,” *Perception* 36 (2007): 888–97.

33. Charlene Ryan and Eugenia Costa-Giomi, “Attractiveness Bias in the Evaluation of Young Pianists’ Performances,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 52 (2004): 141–54.

boosts ratings only when performances are by advanced players, and only for listeners who are not experienced performers themselves on the instrument.”³⁴

Given the numerous studies indicating the influence of visual information on the listening experience, it is easy to see the benefits of having students focus solely on aural stimuli within many classroom scenarios. Nonetheless, some would criticize this method as rooted in a nineteenth-century ideology of art religion, wherein audiences reverently sit in the dark, tune out distractions, and focus on the “music itself.” As a scholar of nineteenth-century music, I am well aware of this concern and make the students aware of it too—by having them listen to late Beethoven in the dark, for instance, which I justify by explaining that we are attempting to approximate the conditions within the moment in music history when such ideologies arose. Indeed, this very ideology may underlie the current undervaluing of performers in anthologies, as the autonomous work itself supposedly transcends any human interpretive element.³⁵ Thus, to widen the scope of the game by showing video clips of different performances can work well, or even be necessary in the case of some twentieth-century works and performance art.

For common-practice repertoire, I have experimented with comparing the experience of audio-only versus audio-visual performances. This method is easily incorporated into the presentation of pieces with formal repetition; for example, I may have students listen to the Norton Anthology recording of Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony for the first half of the third movement, then

34. Joel Wapnick, Charlene Ryan, Nathalie Lacaille, and Alice-Ann Darrow, “Effects of Selected Variables on Musicians’ Ratings of High-level Piano Performances,” *International Journal of Music Education* 22, no. 1 (2004): 16. See also Joel Wapnick, Alice-Ann Darrow, Jolan Kovacs Mazza, and Lucinda Dalrymple, “Effects of Physical Attractiveness on Evaluation of Vocal Performance,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 45 (1997): 470–9; Joel Wapnick, Jolan Kovacs Mazza, and Alice-Ann Darrow, “Effects of Performer Attractiveness, Stage Behavior, and Dress on Violin Performance Evaluation,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 46 (1998): 510–21; Joel Wapnick, Jolan Kovacs Mazza, and Alice-Ann Darrow, “Effects of Performer Attractiveness, Stage Behavior, and Dress on Evaluation of Children’s Piano Performances,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 48 (2000): 323–36; Joel Wapnick, Louise Campbell, Jeanne Siddell-Strebel, Alice-Ann Darrow, “Effects of Non-Musical Attributes and Excerpt Duration on Ratings of High-Level Piano Performances,” *Musicae Scientiæ* 13, no. 1 (2009): 35–54; and Jennifer Hung and Carol Lynne Krumhansl, “What Does Seeing the Performer Add? It Depends on Musical Style, Amount of Stage Behavior, and Audience Expertise,” *Musicae Scientiæ* 15 (2011): 343–64. Daryl W. Kinney has also demonstrated that in blind listenings, judge expertise predicts internal consistency in the evaluation of excerpts; see Daryl W. Kinney, “Internal Consistency of Performance Evaluations as a Function of Music Expertise and Excerpt Familiarity,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 56 (2009): 322–37.

35. See Richard Taruskin’s discussion of this in relation to a review of Ian Bostridge’s *Dichterliebe* performance, “Is There a Baby in the Bathwater? (Part II),” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 63 (2006): 309–11.

show an audiovisual performance for the second half.³⁶ In those cases where we compare audiovisual performances, I invite students to comment upon the visual aspects and to broaden the discussion into the notion of performance as a physical, specifically bodily phenomenon (occasionally this extends into the analysis of cinematography as well). That we discuss these issues at all in music history class only helps to create more links between the past and the present and to challenge students not to accept modern classical performance simply “as it is,” but rather to interrogate the origins of its contexts and ideologies.

Furthermore, the very act of discussing in class whether to listen or watch helps students broaden their own awareness of their listening experiences. In a non-major appreciation class, for example, I have asked students to read two abstracts of the aforementioned studies on listening versus watching. Then we hold our own in-class experiment: first we listen to a section of music, then we watch the same performer play the same passage. I ask students to consider their reactions to the music and whether or how seeing the performer affects their engagement with the piece. The students seem to enjoy both the engagement with the audio and audio-visual performances as well as the element of critical self-interrogation. The major emerging theme is that these non-majors become more aware of an “interpretation” when watching the performer. They seem to accept the piece of music as an objective entity that they interpreted when simply listening; when watching, however, they can feel too exposed to the performer’s own emotional interpretation through the visual cues of facial expression, motion, gesture, etc.—in short, that a certain interpretation was being imposed upon them in conflict with their own emotional reactions to the audio-only clip. I try to suggest that it is the same “interpretation,” simply that they are better versed in visual cues than those of Romantic piano interpretation (or whatever the case may be). But there is no denying that many of the students experience completely different reactions to the performance, and this exercise makes them examine their own engagement with the music and the act of performance itself.

Finally, as an example of one further application, a game does not even have to be listening-based—I have even found it to be a useful way of introducing students to primary sources in music history class. In my prose variation of the game, students must determine whether an excerpted music review was written in the nineteenth century or in 2012. Because this particular game round served as an introduction to a class session on nineteenth-century virtuosity that included Liszt, Chopin, and Schumann, I chose reviews of pianists. I had to make only a few minor changes to obscure the names of the performers;

36. Piotr Il'ich Tchaikovsky, *Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, op. 74, mvt. 3*, Paavo Järvi, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (Telarc Records) in *Norton Recorded Anthology of Western Music*, vol. 2, 6th edition (2010, compact disc).

here are two examples (students, of course, were not privy to footnotes with the sources listed):

1. At that bone-chilling moment, whatever was possessing [him] showed its face. As if encroaching on something forbidden, the audience sat frozen. I had an impulse to turn away in fear, but I stayed transfixed in aesthetic enchantment . . .³⁷

2. He was on the rack, the blood flowed, and the nerves trembled. But as he continued to play, the demon disappeared.³⁸

The ostensible purpose of this particular game was to identify modern and nineteenth-century reviews. Some skeptics might question whether differences in syntax and translation make comparisons impossible, or at least unfair, but two broader outcomes emerged from this “prose game,” however imperfect it may seem. First, even beyond the game element, the colorful prose and Romantic descriptions themselves immediately engaged students with the subject of performance and virtuosity. Second, the sheer volume of examples (twenty-two all told) opened discussion to themes that emerged in reception—for example, the two given quotes offer a nice segue into the idea of demonic possession and narratives of virtuosic heroism. Finally, the prose round challenged students to recognize both similarities and differences in modes of reception then and now.

Conclusion

These games are useful in class, not simply as exercise or extra practice, but as agreeable and intriguing variations on the kind of critical listening I try to teach through the main pieces in the anthology. Whether comparing different performances or different excerpts of pieces, students are challenged to perceive nuances, articulate them, and evaluate them. Perhaps of greater importance to those professors who want their students to listen beyond formal elements, the game offers a method of discussing and appreciating the performers themselves.³⁹ Listening to multiple performances can also broaden classroom discussion to topics of historical interest: aesthetic values of virtuosity, the concept

37. Joel Luks, “A Demonic Element: Daniil Trifonov’s Bone-Chilling Recital is more than Technical Mayhem,” *Houston Culture Map*, Feb. 27, 2012, <http://houston.culturemap.com/newsdetail/02-27-12-10-52-a-demonic-element-daniil-trifonovs-bone-chilling-recital-is-more-than-technical-mayhem/>.

38. Review of Franz Liszt by Hans Christian Andersen, *A Poet’s Bazaar* (1846 edition) cited in translation in Dana Gooley, “Liszt and his Audiences, 1834–1847: Virtuosity, Criticism, and Society in the *Virtuosenzeit*” (PhD diss., Princeton, 1999), 350.

39. Electronic music brings up its own set of aesthetic issues precisely because of the removal of the performer.

of the work, audience habits and expectations in different periods, and the vestiges of nineteenth-century values in the concert hall and music world today. Ultimately, such games can help students engage with the human element of music making—and with what performers do best: bring music to life.