

Roundtable Introduction: Rethinking Primary Sources for the Music History Classroom

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Although the growing scholarship on music history pedagogy reveals a wide range of creative instructional approaches, researchers appear united around the value of student-directed learning. Recent work demonstrates convincingly that emphasizing exploration and discovery, information literacy, problem-solving, and critical questioning increases engagement,¹ creates opportunities for students to forge personal connections with historical material,² and more generally builds “transferable music-historical skills.”³

Most often, these approaches involve an invitation (even if implicitly articulated) to become historians not only through the acquisition of discipline-specific knowledge but also through historiographical acts of interpretation and habits of mind.⁴ These modes of thought are rarely preprogrammed in students and thus require intentional training in critical thinking techniques essential to the discipline.⁵ Maria Purciello argues that part of “the disconnect between student perceptions of music history and its reality” is due in part to “the fact

1. Kevin R. Burke, “Roleplaying Music History: Honing General Education Skills via ‘Reacting to the Past,’” this *Journal* 5, no. 1 (2014): 3–5, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/134/245>.

2. Ibid., 8. For a wealth of practical active-learning ideas that engage various senses, see Mary Natvig, “Classroom Activities,” in *The Music History Classroom*, ed. James A. Davis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 15–30.

3. Melanie Lowe, “Rethinking the Undergraduate Music History Sequence in the Information Age,” this *Journal* 5, no. 2 (2015): 67, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/177/317>. See also Colin Roust, “Toward a Skills-Based Curriculum in the Music History Classroom,” *Musica Docta* 6 (2016): 105–108, <https://musicadocta.unibo.it/article/view/6575/6372> and Sara Haefeli, “From Answers to Questions: Fostering Student Creativity and Engagement in Research and Writing,” this *Journal* 7, no. 1 (2016): 1–17, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/192>.

4. Tim Cochran, “How Can We Use Music to Think About How History Works?” *The Jigsaw* (blog), August 23, 2016, <http://www.teachingmusichistory.com/2016/08/23/how-can-we-use-music-to-think-about-how-history-works/>.

5. J. Peter Burkholder, “Decoding the Discipline of Music History for Our Students,” this *Journal* 1, no. 2 (2011): 93, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/22/46>.

that the way we teach music history today is largely at odds with the way that we ‘do’ history.”⁶ Similarly, J. Peter Burkholder proposes, “In music history class, we are teaching not just a pile of information, but also how to think like music historians. Yet we rarely make explicit that goal, or how to master the particular ways of thinking and disciplinary skills that underlie an understanding of music history.”⁷ These scholars imply that comprehension is a product of instruction that makes our musicological ways of thinking explicit and teaches students how to produce knowledge through engagement with the data of music history. As the material basis for historical claims, primary sources of all kinds play a key role in teaching our students how to be music historians. They serve a range of historiographical purposes: to promote interpretations of historical data over passive memorization of facts; to establish and question aesthetic, social, stylistic, and performance contexts; to add dimensions to student knowledge through varied modes of inquiry and sources of information; and to inspire historical imaginations and questions. In short, primary sources are means of discovery that can empower students to direct their learning and make the process of learning enjoyable, satisfying, and relevant.

Yet several factors often hinder deep and active engagement with primary sources. Students may have little experience accessing, contextualizing, analyzing, and making claims about historical documents. Furthermore, students often encounter such sources in textbooks or anthologies that decontextualize and edit them for publication. Inexperience—coupled with the false impression that primary source excerpts provide supplementary rather essential material for engagement with history⁸—can lead to superficial understanding and problematic assumptions about a text’s meanings and origins. To become effective classroom tools, primary sources require intentional pedagogical strategies that break down these assumptions, build interpretation skills, and raise awareness

6. Maria Anne Purciello, “Reconnecting with History: Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in the Music History Classroom,” *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy* 5 (2017), accessed June 19, 2018, <http://flipcamp.org/engagingstudents5/essays/purciello.html>.

7. Burkholder, “Decoding the Discipline of Music History for Our Students,” 94. Maria Rosa de Luca advocates for a “laboratory mode” that “restores the link between *doing* and *knowing*” in “Constructing Music History in the Classroom,” *Musica Docta* 6 (2016): 117, <https://musicadocta.unibo.it/article/viewFile/6577/6374>. See also Roust, “Toward a Skills-Based Curriculum in the Music History Classroom,” 107.

8. Aiming to counter such inexperience and assumptions, several fascinating initiatives (primarily for K–12 education) stress the value of active primary source work for the development of critical thought. See Stacie Moats, “Teaching With Primary Sources: A Library of Congress Program,” *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, May 2012, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2012/possibilities-of-pedagogy/teaching-with-primary-sources>; “Historical Thinking Matters,” *Historical Thinking Matters*, Accessed 6 June 2018, <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/about/>.

of where sources come from and how they contribute to the production of knowledge.

This roundtable (originally developed for a panel of mini-workshops at the 2017 Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Rochester, NY) was designed to address the historiographical possibilities in the music history classroom as well as some of the hindrances presented by a few specific kinds of primary sources. Representing a range of institutions (large and small, research and liberal arts), the authors focus on different types of primary sources and offer pedagogical strategies that encourage students to engage with them critically and creatively. In the first article, Blake Howe (Louisiana State University) argues that we can help students perceive historical events as more real and multifaceted by immersing the class in unabridged collections of primary material, which help students see the messiness of historical detail and require them to make their own editorial interpretations, abridgments, and conclusions. Next, Timothy Cochran (Eastern Connecticut State University) suggests drawing on models of rhetorical analysis to help students move from skimming for the gist in a source reading to mapping out a text's rhetorical strategy in order to make historical claims based on structural observations. The third and fourth articles address the way we approach musical scores in the classroom. Focusing on performance practice instruction, Rebecca Cypess (Rutgers University) explores how we might counter the common student assumption that treatises establish strict rules for execution. Cypess highlights the need to cultivate "historical thinking" practices, which equip students to interpret their historical sources in ways that expand rather than limit their creative and expressive performance options. Finally, Brooks Kuykendall (University of Mary Washington) promotes the value of destabilizing students' understanding of musical scores as fixed texts, inviting us to help students think about musical scores as "artifact[s] of music history" mediated by editorial decisions with implications for our understanding of history, information literacy, and approaches to performance.

Although this roundtable cannot offer an exhaustive account of musical artifacts for the music history classroom (as if that were possible or desirable), the authors hope to spark further critical reflection on and innovative uses of various primary source types. More broadly, they invite us to pay close attention to the wealth of resources around us (both physical and digital), to think creatively and intentionally about how these resources might promote active learning, and ultimately, to join our students in the pleasure of exploration.