

Bethanie L. Hansen. *Teaching Music Appreciation Online*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. viii + 369pp. \$36.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-069838-6 (Paper).

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Bethanie Hansen's *Teaching Music Appreciation Online* has come at an opportune moment. Published in November 2019, just months before the COVID-19 pandemic, the book is designed specifically for instructors teaching music appreciation (and other general education music courses) in an online environment. Before the pandemic, online college courses were certainly becoming more commonplace, but at some institutions they still formed a relatively small part of a school's overall offerings. (For example, my institution offered only three fully-online music courses each semester, mostly geared toward non-music majors, as opposed to approximately one hundred in-person courses.) But the COVID-19 pandemic has changed everything. In March 2020, as many universities and colleges in the US transitioned to remote teaching, many instructors had to grapple with teaching online for the first time. Since then, instructors have adopted a range of online pedagogical practices—often on an ad hoc basis—as classroom needs and university policies continue to shift in response to the ongoing pandemic. *Teaching Music Appreciation Online* provides tools that are timely and helpful to a broad range of instructors, including those who may be struggling in this current moment. Overall, the book offers specific strategies for bolstering student learning and skill development that can equal (and in some cases improve on) those of a face-to-face course. It also demonstrates that online teaching can be a fulfilling experience; that faculty can potentially be more involved in class group discussions and provide more individualized attention, and that students are often able to be more active participants in an online environment.

The title might seem to suggest that the book is intended for those teaching music history courses to non-majors. However, the term “music appreciation” is used broadly here, to refer to liberal arts and general education courses such as popular music, world music, jazz, or any other related subjects geared toward

non-music majors. Most importantly, the general philosophy and approaches to teaching online offered here could also be applied to teaching any music course, not just those for non-majors. Overall, this is an excellent resource for first-time instructors who are creating a new online course, experienced instructors who are new to online teaching, and even instructors of face-to-face courses who may want to adopt some aspects of online modality.

The book has a clear organization that makes it easy to navigate and use. Chapters are self-contained and may be read individually. While this design creates some redundancy throughout the book, overall it is a welcome feature, since many readers may not need to examine every chapter in detail. The book contains fifteen chapters, arranged into four larger sections. The first part, “Mindset and Philosophy,” includes the first two chapters, and would be especially beneficial to instructors with no prior teaching experience. Chapter 1, “Orientation to Online Education,” provides an overview of the nature of online teaching, drawing attention to the main differences between an asynchronous online course and a traditional live lecture course, and a summary of some basic features of online courses, such as videos, forum discussions, and assignments. (More experienced instructors could likely skip this chapter.)

In chapter 2, “Philosophy and Mindset for Online Education,” Hansen discusses the “aesthetic” and “praxial” philosophies of music education and how they might be adapted to an online format. Aesthetic philosophy involves a more traditional approach based on active listening, musical analysis, understanding form, historical context, and identification of composers and styles; praxial philosophy focuses on active student participation in creating and experiencing music, such as singing, dancing, drumming, or composing. Instructors without much experience will likely find this chapter useful, as there is a section on how to develop your own teaching philosophy, complete with sample philosophy statements and overview of an online self-assessment tool. However, experienced teachers may also find some ideas to hone (or invigorate) their own philosophies. I especially appreciate how Hansen emphasizes that an online course is not meant to be a simple replication of a face-to-face course, since a carbon-copy approach is ineffective and “can lead to the perception that online teaching is a burden, a requirement, or just another way to increase income” (39). Hansen also stresses that instructors should cultivate a flexible mindset when dealing with unexpected student conflicts (such as employment demands, parenting, illness). This advice is particularly important for inexperienced teachers, who can often be overzealous about rules and assignment deadlines. This perspective is also timely: we all could strive to create more empathy and understanding in our personal interactions during this pandemic.

Part II, “Planning the Course,” includes chapters 3–5. “Big Picture Planning and Backward Mapping” (chapter 3) focuses on curriculum design using the

well-known “backward mapping” approach, where the goal is to first establish course goals and learning outcomes, then create assessments, and then develop methods and strategies for delivering specific course content. Hansen provides numerous examples and checklists to help readers come up with appropriate course goals and learning outcomes, which is often a difficult part of the design process. This chapter will be most helpful for those who need to create an entirely new course from scratch. Experienced instructors should also be able to find some helpful information, such as the discussion on three different approaches to creating course content: sequential (stylistic periods are presented chronologically), thematic (organized around themes such as music and love, music and politics, music and gender, etc.), and modular (units are independent of each other and can be taught in any order).

Chapter 4, “Curriculum Content,” aims to help instructors select course material; it provides lists of textbooks and open educational resources (OERs), guidance on the benefits and drawbacks of each, and a preliminary overview of instructor lecture videos. Although this information is useful, there is one big missed opportunity: as an extension of the list of music appreciation textbooks, it would be helpful to have an overview of each textbook’s online platform. As publishers are increasingly developing the online capabilities and resources associated with their textbooks, it only seems natural for a book about online teaching to devote some time to a discussion of which textbooks might provide the most engaging online experience for students. Some questions that could have been addressed in such an overview are: How user-friendly are these sites for both students and instructors? Are listening resources provided, and how easy is it for students to access these or for instructors to integrate them into the modules of a Learning Management System (LMS)? Are there interactive listening guides or other interactive examples that can help students understand concepts like melody, harmony, and rhythm? What is the quality of the quizzes provided, and can these be integrated seamlessly as graded assessments into a course’s LMS?

Chapter 5, “Methods and Strategies,” focuses on instructional approaches that are particularly well-suited to an online environment, as opposed to making videos that simply recreate the lecture-style format of face-to-face courses. Such approaches include asynchronous forum discussions, group work, and games and simulations, which can include role-playing activities such as an imaginary conversation between composers of different eras, or more complex simulations that can be facilitated through the use of online platforms like Second Life. These types of assignments are interesting, but more guidance and specific examples would be helpful, since games and simulations may be unfamiliar territory for many instructors.

Part III, “Specifics of Course Components and Samples,” homes in on several ideas introduced earlier in the book. This section begins with chapter 6, “Forum Discussions,” which Hansen characterizes as “one of the hallmark components of online courses” (98). The thorough guidelines presented here—including tips on writing successful prompts, participation requirements, the role of the instructor within discussions, grading, and the wide variety of examples—make this one of the most useful parts of the book, since online discussions are an integral part of online teaching.

Chapter 7, “Quizzes, Tests, and Assessments,” includes guidelines on creating and organizing online test material, as well as some sample questions. This is an important topic, since even experienced instructors (who may not need Hansen’s advice on writing effective test questions) may not anticipate some of the unique challenges of online assessments that make creating them time-consuming, such as the need for large test banks to help prevent cheating, to give just one example.

Chapter 8, “Assignments,” considers other types of assessments, such as group projects, blogs, multimedia presentations, and videos, in addition to the more common essays, journals, reflections, listening/analysis charts, and reports, and provides numerous examples of each. The music and lip-sync videos may be a particularly effective and creative way to get students to engage with the course content. One interesting example of group work that seems to work well in the author’s classes is the “Let’s Blab About Jazz Composers” project, where students work together to create a PowerPoint presentation on a jazz composer. However, there is little detail about the kind of information students should provide or what type of sources they should use, no advice about how to help students learn about broader contexts in jazz (which often involve issues of race, gender, and social justice), and no discussion of how to assess the finished product. The assignment description refers to a “group project grading rubric” (183), but Hansen does not provide it.

Chapter 9, “Rubrics and Evaluation Tools,” guides readers through the grading process. Hansen emphasizes that “student complaints in online education often come from a lack of grading feedback, minimal grading comments, or scores that seem arbitrarily derived” (189), and stresses the importance of rubrics for providing vital feedback to students in online courses. Hansen offers guidelines for creating proper rubrics, although the sample essay rubric (193) would be more useful with criteria that related specifically to music classes; I suggest adding elements such as “analysis of the music is thoughtful and arguments are supported with specific examples,” or “student makes proper use of musical terms.” This chapter also includes tips on how to increase grading efficiency, such as using checklists for low-stakes assignments and voice recordings to provide personalized comments. This advice is also potentially useful for

face-to-face courses as many instructors now accept and grade student work through their LMS.

Chapter 10, “Multimedia Assets,” guides readers through various tools for integrating sound clips, videos, presentations, animations, and other multimedia content into a course. It also provides recommendations on the types of material instructors can use to comply with copyright restrictions. However, some obvious suggestions like embedding content from YouTube or creating Spotify playlists are surprisingly absent. Hansen recommends creating short, concise videos on a single topic that can be easily digested by students, as opposed to long videos that approximate a traditional lecture course. The author also discusses how to create sound clips with narration, which allows instructors to point out specific details in a piece of music, much as they would in a face-to-face course.

The book’s final section, “Preparing, Teaching, and Ending the Course,” includes chapters 11–15. Chapter 11, “Preparing the Online Classroom,” describes how to set up a course before the first day of classes. This advice is particularly useful for first-time instructors who may feel overwhelmed with keeping track of the many aspects of online teaching and course creation in a new online format. This chapter also contains helpful examples of various procedural course documents, such as a netiquette guide, instructor bio, first-week announcement, and sample policies on absences, assignment submissions, and plagiarism. However, this chapter would be enriched with guidance for those who aren’t able to prepare everything before the semester begins, especially since many online instructors are adjuncts or other part-time instructors who may be tasked with teaching an online course at the last minute. (Note that the advice given in the next chapter, and in many other parts of the book, depends on having all aspects of the course ready before the first day of class.)

Chapter 12, “Teaching the Course,” examines online classroom instruction through three modes: teaching presence (sending announcements, providing personalized feedback, and teaching through the use of videos, narrated presentations, or written text); social presence (posting an instructor bio, participation in forum discussions, holding virtual office hours); and cognitive presence (asking strategic questions, using approaches that allow students to apply their learning, providing materials and dialogue that will foster critical thinking). The rest of the chapter discusses techniques for time management, including sending announcements, replying to emails, and grading, and offers several practical suggestions for increasing efficiency, such as using text expanders, which can automatically input pre-written phrases or sentences by typing specific keystrokes.

Chapter 13, “Assisting Students,” focuses on interacting with a broad range of students, including adult learners, students with disabilities, and students

who feel less personal accountability in an online format. This advice will be most helpful for first-time instructors who may have little experience dealing with the various difficulties that may arise in online courses. For example, in the section on impolite students who may lack manners or aggressively question an instructor's judgment or skills, I especially appreciated the sound advice for instructors to take care and time with their (digital) replies, to "seek an honest solution" (278) to the student's problems, and to consider that others may end up seeing your response if the matter turns into a formal complaint.

"Ending the Course" (chapter 14) focuses on wrapping things up during the final week of a course, including participating in final group discussions, making sure all assignments are graded, reaching out to students who may need help (though it would be good to do this before the last week), sending final announcements, and other last-minute details. Finally, chapter 15 is for those "Teaching Multiple Courses or at Multiple Institutions," and mostly provides advice on time management, including suggestions on tools that can make grading more efficient.

Two very useful features of this book are the chapter summaries and infographics found at the end of each chapter. Readers may want to consult these first, since they provide a concise overview of each chapter. The infographics, in particular, are good examples of the types of tools instructors can develop to help students understand and navigate through course content. They contain information regarding the most salient aspects of each chapter in an easy-to-follow, visually-appealing format. The book also contains an appendix that consolidates all the sample assignments, charts, and teaching tools provided within each chapter. Browsing the appendix can be a helpful source of ideas for assignments, but it is difficult to find the discussion of each assignment in the main body of the book because the chapter and page number for each discussion are not listed in the appendix.

Some aspects of the book could use more refinement. Unfortunately, much of the excellent advice in the book is geared toward smaller classes, without any concrete explanations of how these approaches could be adapted for larger courses. For example, in chapter 6 Hansen (rightly) emphasizes weekly forum discussions as one of the most essential elements in online teaching. Online forum discussions engage students, foster critical thinking, put introverted and extroverted students on more equal footing, and encourage participation from students with less musical experience. Hansen never specifies the number of students participating in such discussions, but from descriptions of time that should be spent grading and of students reading each other's work, it seems that the author has in mind a course with roughly twenty students. Hansen suggests having at least one forum discussion per week, requiring initial posts of between 200–300 words, and two peer responses of 100 words; in addition,

students are expected to follow up on the instructor's and other students' replies, as well as complete any other quizzes/tests/assignments for the week. Although a good starting point for those teaching small sections, this structure will most likely prove to be impossible for a large course due to the demands placed on the instructor, especially if an instructor is teaching multiple courses with large enrollment (as many online instructors do). Hansen describes how instructors should read all posts and replies (at 450 words per student in a class of seventy-five students, that's about 34,000 words per week for a single class), respond to individual students and ask specific questions, and provide private feedback to each student after each discussion has closed. This level of personalized attention to individual students—while lovely in theory—is not practical for a teacher managing a total enrollment of several hundred students, since they also must keep up with the grading of any other assignments (such as quizzes, tests, and papers).

This oversight also translates to other areas of the book that assume small class sections, such as the suggestions on time management and grading in chapter 12. At the very least, a chapter or sections within chapters on how to adjust the structure of a course for large classes would be appreciated. For example, how can we tailor the number and types of assignments to a large enrollment? What is the best way of dealing with forum discussions in a large course? If an instructor creates separate groups for discussions to accommodate a large class, how many students per group is ideal, and how can instructors best manage forums with a large number of groups? Is there a way for instructors to save time grading and still provide valuable feedback that will help students learn and improve their skills?

Hansen advises to use quizzes sparingly and not give them too much weight (only 5 to 10 percent of the total grade) because of the potential for cheating and because quizzes may not necessarily accurately measure a student's understanding of course content. I find, however, that quizzes can be an effective assessment tool, especially in large courses. Certainly, quizzes should not make up the entire grade for an online course, but with properly written questions, they can help determine if students are engaging with the course content. Quizzes that are graded by the LMS can help alleviate some of the grading burden for large classes and there are ways to prevent or discourage cheating—for both online and face-to-face classes. As Hansen suggests, instructors should set time limits and create large, separate question banks for various topics, from which the LMS will draw randomly, giving each student a different set of questions. One important suggestion that is missing from this book is the use of remote proctoring services, such as Honorlock or Proctorio, if one is particularly worried about cheating. Hansen does suggest using originality-checking software

(such as Turnitin) for written assignments, but notes that students can still pay someone to write their papers for them.

Overall, *Teaching Music Appreciation Online* is a solid guide that offers a wealth of information, especially for those who are new to online teaching. At the time of writing, many instructors have returned to in-person teaching. However, online instruction is clearly here to stay, and as demand increases, instructors are increasingly expected to be well-versed in online modalities. Hansen convincingly shows that online teaching can be a worthwhile and satisfying endeavor for both students and instructors. Teaching online may seem like a daunting task, but Hansen's book provides a helpful model, especially for those embarking on this path for the first time.