

Wake-up! Computer Assisted Instruction in the Collegiate Music Appreciation Classroom

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When most college students think of Music Appreciation, they envision another one of those “boring” general education courses. Maybe it’s the monotone professors droning on about times and places to which the students can’t relate. Perhaps it’s the endless lists of important names and dates to be memorized. Or maybe it’s simply having to listen to all that “classical” music. Whatever the reason, Music Appreciation seems to have earned the reputation on most college campuses as a good class to register for if you need to catch up on some sleep.

My own experience in music appreciation was not a good one. I was in the second semester of my freshman year at a large private University. I had signed up for music appreciation because I really enjoyed music and thought that this class would be very informative. I remember entering the auditorium on the first day and seeing about 150 other anxious students. As class started, the professor began playing an excerpt from a symphony on a record player at the front of the room. We listened for several minutes in silence. Finally he stopped the music and began to discuss the piece we had just heard. I frantically tried to take notes on his lecture, but I was unfamiliar with the music he had played, and had no way to relate his lecture to the music we had listened to. Before I was able to grasp the gist of his lecture, we were listening to another example. It was only the first day of class, but I was already lost. The rest of the semester proceeded in similar fashion. Somehow, I managed to pass the class, but at the end of the semester, I certainly didn’t feel like I was better able to appreciate music.

I don’t think that students sleep through music appreciation because the subject matter is boring. In fact, the study of music’s history is filled with interesting people, colorful stories, sordid love affairs, and powerful political commentary – and all this with its own built-in sound track! Music appreciation can open up a whole new world of understanding for many students, however, the subject matter is often presented in such a way that students find themselves as outsiders looking in on this world, rather than recognizing that they are a part of it.

When I began teaching music appreciation myself, I was determined to help students become part of this world of music. I decided that the best way to do this was to structure my class around something that is so much a part of their world – technology. Students in my music appreciation classes become interested and involved in the learning process because as I fully integrate the use of technology in my classroom instruction and homework assignments. My tools in this process include a “Smart Cart”, the Internet, a course website using Blackboard, software programs such as CakeWalk, PowerPoint, Finale, and Cool Edit Pro, and interactive listening guides on CD ROMs that correlate with the paper textbook.

Classroom Instruction

The first important component in making my Music Appreciation class interesting and effective is to incorporate technology into the classroom instruction. With the use of a “Smart Cart” or “Smart Classroom” I can incorporate video clips, PowerPoint presentations, interactive CD ROMs and the World Wide Web in an interactive delivery that gets students interested and keeps them involved in the instruction.

The “Smart Cart” is a portable station that houses an LCD projector, a laptop computer, a DVD/VCR player, and a stereo with good speakers. This unit is the easiest way to bring multimedia interaction into any classroom. In some new lecture classrooms, these components are hard-wired and mounted in the room with a controller embedded in the lectern. This is known as a “Smart Classroom”.

The components of the “Smart Cart” can be used to great advantage in the Music Appreciation classroom. One way to do this is with video presentations. For example, I supplement my discussion of Wagnerian *leitmotifs* with clips from *Star Wars*. The study of opera is much more interesting and better understood when DVD clips of the opera can be viewed on a large screen. Additionally, many music appreciation texts are paired with companion videotapes for instructors to use as a supplement to lectures.

Another way the “Smart Cart” can be of use is by including PowerPoint presentations. Professors in many disciplines have used PowerPoint to improve the effectiveness of instruction, however, in music there are some specific advantages. Through a fairly simple process, CD recordings can be aligned with the slide changes in PowerPoint creating an interactive listening guide. Slides can be created that illustrate musical form, coincide with the text, or delineate major sections of a musical example while the example is playing. Also, PowerPoint provides an easy way to display small photos, or sections of a musical score for the entire class. For example, I was able to “pass around” photos of my recent trip to study Bach’s Calov Bible without wasting any class time or losing the students’ attention (see Figure 1).

Homework Assignments

Another way I incorporate technology into the Music Appreciation classroom is through homework assignments. My students are required to purchase the *Understanding Music* textbook by Jeremy Yudkin. This text is packaged with a set of CDs containing many of the listening examples that I require the students to be familiar with throughout the semester. A CD ROM accompanies this set of CDs. During the first day of class instruction, I tell students that they are to load the CD ROM onto their personal computers. I also have a copy of the CD ROM loaded into stations in the music technology lab. The CD ROM contains interactive listening guides for each of the musical examples on their CDs (see Figure 2). In their personal study, students can access the music we have discussed in class. The interactive listening guide highlights important elements of the music in real time, allowing for focused understanding of each musical example (see Figure 3). Since students own the CDs, they have access to the musical examples throughout the semester at any time when it is convenient for them to study. Most students have no trouble navigating the CD ROM, and find it a very engaging and enjoyable way to study.

In addition to the interactive listening guides, I assign music technology projects to my students. These projects incorporate use of the Internet with music technology software and allow the students to interact with music in new and exciting ways. For one assignment, students are asked to use a music-sequencing program to create Gregorian Chants. Another assignment requires students to use a music-recording program to splice together music from different time periods. Yet another assignment asks students to download a midi file of some classical masterpiece, import it into a music notation program, and then change the instruments to create a modern version of the masterpiece. Students learn a great deal about music as they use familiar tools such as computers and the Internet to manipulate music in ways they never thought they could. All of these kinds of activities keep the students very interested and involved in the music appreciation course.

Additionally, all details of my course, including course expectations, assignments, grades and so forth are found on the course's Blackboard website. Blackboard is a program used by many universities to manage class and registration information. It can be especially effective in the music appreciation classroom because in addition to its regular functions, I can use the site's bulletin board to post musical files. In one instance, I was able to post a recording of my Women's Chorus singing a French *Chanson*. My music appreciation students could get online and go to the course website to access the recording at any time in their preparation for their exam.

Summary

The collegiate Music Appreciation course has earned the reputation as a boring General Education elective. However, technology can be very effective in creating classroom instruction and homework activities that are engaging, interactive, and highly educational. The use of technology such as a "Smart Cart", video clips, the Internet, music software programs, and CD ROMs can help to turn the sleepest college students into active music appreciators.

Figure 5. Example of a PowerPoint presentation on Bach's Calov Bible

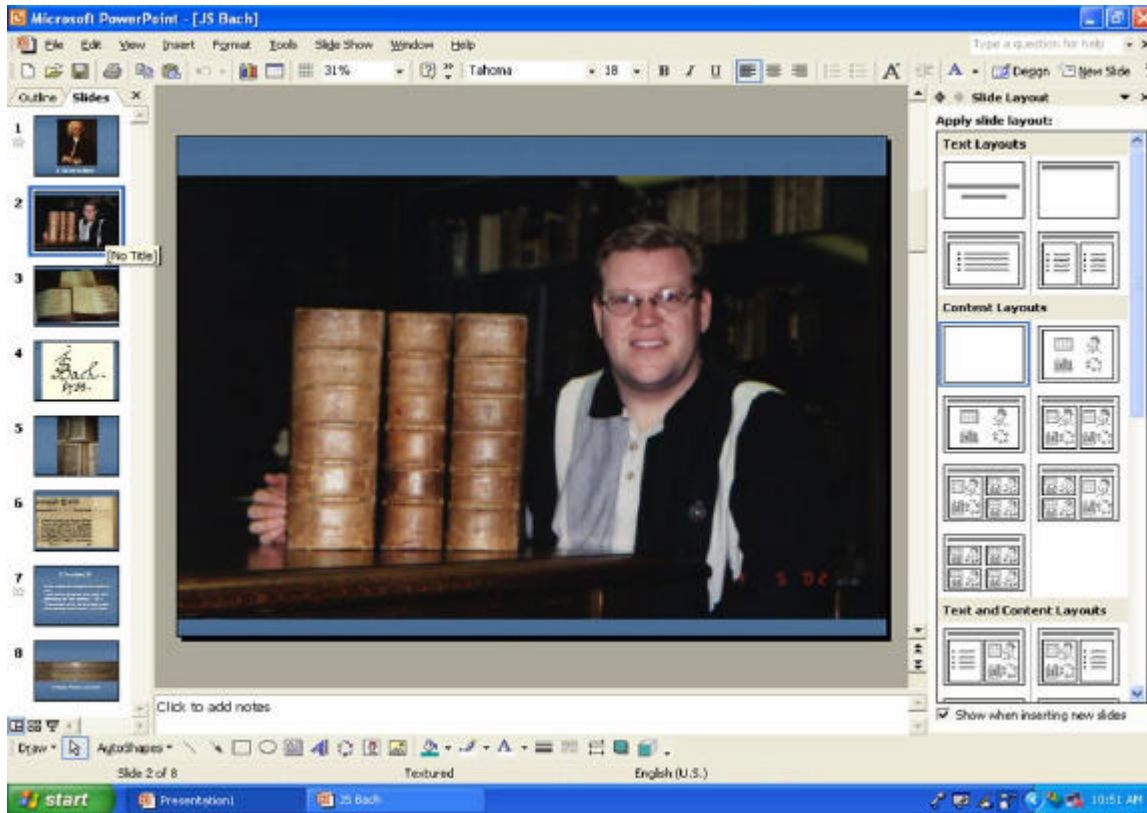


Figure 6. Table of Contents Screen for Understanding Music CD ROM

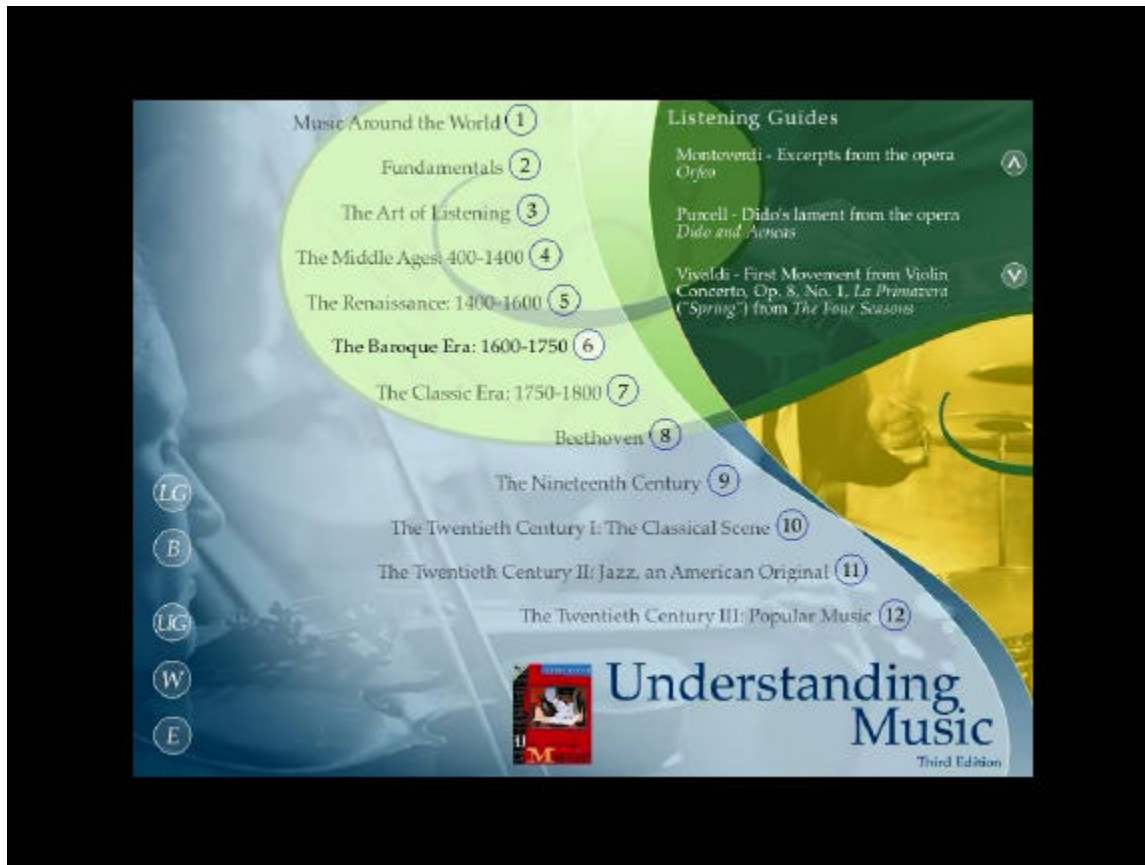


Figure 7. Interactive Listening Guide for Antonio Vivaldi's *Spring*

Listening Guide
Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) Date: 1725
First Movement from Violin Concerto, Op. 8, Duration: 3:34
No. 1, *La Primavera* ("Spring"), from *The Four Seasons*

0:00 0:35 0:32 1:08 1:16 1:41 1:40 2:17 2:25 2:43

Solo violin, strings, and harpsichord

Please insert audio CD 2

Track	Time	Description
	0:00	Allegro: ["fast"] "Spring has arrived, and full of joy" [Ritornello in tonic, first half, loud and then soft]
	0:15	[Ritornello in tonic, second half, loud and then soft]
	0:32	"The birds greet it with their happy song." [Trills; three solo violins alone, no basso continuo]
	1:08	[Ritornello in tonic, second half, once only, loud]
	1:16	"The streams, swept by gentle breezes, flow along with a sweet murmur." [Quiet and murmuring]

Play Pause
Stop < >

M W < > CN B