THREADS AND CURRENCY IN MUSIC HISTORY:
THE PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF A PROFESSOR OF POPULAR MUSIC

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A phenomenological and exploratory study comparing the philosophy and practice of the investigator, specifically his online course Music History, running since the fall of 2013. The researcher's philosophy was documented in a half hour of writing and this, along with PowerPoints, tests, blog topics, instructions and the syllabus went through a two-tier coding process. Nine categories, which addressed the intended research focus of musical "threads" and popular music in music history, were utilized for the first tier. The investigator views that these two topics are pertinent and valuable in any music class. The second tier of coding allowed sub-categories and themes to emerge from the data. Emergent findings were compared between the philosophical statement and the pedagogical data for harmony and discord. Dependability was strengthened by triangulation with outside (student) evaluations. Confirmability was strengthened by an independent coder in the first tier of analysis.

CATEGORIES / DEFINITION / RESULTS / SUMMARY

CATEGORIES	DEFINITION	RESULTS
Musical Thread	Any reference to musicians or music in general over time or across musical eras	Chamber music underrepresented. Thread, as hypothesized, not overt. Variations: theme, origin, seed, absorbed, modern, influence and connect "Musical elements" common but, arguably, not frequent enough to support philosophical statement
Timeless Music	Great music that has "stood the test of time" and exceptional modern works subjectively included by the professor.	Originally text was *Exploring music literature* (Fink, 1999). With revisions, ¼ of the coded data was Canadian and shows my bias. Question: Just because music stands the "test of time," does that mean it deserves to be studied?
Ties to Popular Music	Any reference or links to popular music.	Variety of examples: Leonard Cohen (poetic verse) to Lady Gaga (operatic traits). Musical elements highlighted by current artists. Blog requires students to apply concepts and provide opinion
Common Meaning	References to how one can *generally* infer meaning in music through its instrumental and vocal offerings.	SMALL TOWN CANADA: familiar music, romance, love, stories, introspection, humor, people, fathers and metaphor
Common Rhythm	Reference to rhythm or rhythmic elements, which might be applied to any music.	IT'S IN THE ACTION: defining (beat, rhythm, tempo, meter), identifying (meter, era, piece) and finding (beat)
Common Melody	Reference to melody or melodic elements, which can be applied to any music.	ACTION, TAKE 2: defining (pitch, note, texture, cadence), identifying (texture, form, cadence) and labelling (era and style)
Common Timbre	References to timbre, which can be applied to any music. Timbre is the colour of sound or the characteristics that define a sound .	Much time defining and assigning timbre to eras, composers and works. If timbre is subjective, is this work futile? Maybe more time should be spent on what the students are hearing.
Successful Pedagogy	References to successful teaching in the classroom or positive class experiences.	Interested and enthusiastic = student motivation. Frequent communication: emails and blogs, patience and humor. Praise: effective, enjoyable, appreciation, variety and interesting
Open	Promising data that does not fit a previous category.	I believe that students have to be active learners; sharing their expertise, their views and their passion. Two "other" themes emerged that allow non-musicians to better participate in this course: ties to the other arts (often visual) & ties to popular culture. Students can & do speak to these.

SUMMARY

The themes that emerged from the two-tier analysis supported the researcher's philosophical statement. It states that I teach music history topically by ensemble. It is noted in the results that chamber music is underrepresented. Audio-visuals, PowerPoints and blogs are used for each topic. The musical elements are taught and revisited throughout the course, although this area could be reinforced. The idea of a musical thread throughout all musical eras is introduced and discussed with a variety of terminology. This may be a weakness for students who like consistency. I require students to be active participants (information providers) in the class through the blog and this has been successful. Popular music is used to highlight the musical elements and to compare to historical pieces of music and this seems to be very successful. While there is a lot of classification/definitions in this class (musical eras and terms), I try to bridge the information to what the students know by using a variety of examples from music and the arts. This case study may lead to a similar methodology in my other classes: Popular Music, Canadian Popular Music, Music in Popular Culture I and II and Introduction to Popular Music and Culture.

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