

The Institute for Music History Pedagogy
June 8-10, 2006
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Board Member for Musicology

“Change is gonna come,” as one Institute participant quipped in the final evaluation, and another observed, “The chronological story of music we tell requires creative adjustments of repertoire and approach.”

Many have argued that teaching the undergraduate major Survey of Western Music History, fundamental in all programs, must significantly be invigorated. The canon must be contextualized. The situation in colleges and universities demands that contemporary pedagogy consider cultural dimensions, critical theory, popular and other innovative repertoires, and ethnic and gender issues. Moreover and equally important, it must engage the student by writing to learn, peer interaction, and other “seminar” experiences such as the extrapolation of new ideas from the facts and perceptions that authorities pass along.

Toward that end, on 8-10 June 2006 the College Music Society sponsored the Institute for Music History Pedagogy at Butler University in Indianapolis. The Institute was devoted to teaching the undergraduate Western music history survey for majors. James Briscoe (Butler) directed the series of lectures, critiques, Baroque performance both as a recital set in social context and as an element of history teaching, and technology in teaching; museum tours; and creative deliveries of “class slices” by each participant.

A recital by the Ensemble Voltaire presented music by Elisabeth La Guerre, François Couperin, and others, intersected by a dramatized and costumed reading of letters by Elisabeth Charlotte, “Madame” la Duchesse d’Orléans in the court of Louis XIV. The Indianapolis Museum of Art and Eiteljorg Museum of Western Art and the American Indian warmly welcomed Institute participants, conducting scholarly tours and freely offering the use of facilities. Contributing significantly were the noted scholar-teachers Matthew Balensuela (DePauw), Michael Beckerman (New York University), Susan Cook (Wisconsin), Margot Fassler (Yale), Robert Fink (UCLA), Gesa Kordes (Indiana), Roberta Lindsey (Indiana-Indianapolis), Mary Natvig (Bowling Green-Ohio), James Parakilas (Bates), and Michael Pisani (Vassar). These compelled new thought among those who enrolled by addressing Music and ‘The Other,’ Technology and Music History, A Critique of Current Textbooks, Music and Meaning in the Middle Ages: Confronting Hildegard and Abélard, Music in Film and Opera on Film, Engaging Historic Performance in Baroque Music History Teaching, Music History at the Twilight of the Canon, and “Teaching what you don’t know.”

The 44 participants, the maximum permitted by Institute venues (with 8 on the waiting list), included musicologists with abundant teaching experience, administrators, graduate students eager to begin or just beginning teaching, and specialists in other subdisciplines who likewise teach music history. Colleagues came from institutions as varied in educational goals and as geographically distributed as Palm Beach Atlantic, Juilliard, Berea College, the University of Toronto, Oklahoma Christian, Plattsburgh State, Eastern New Mexico, Mississippi State, Indiana University, Concordia University, and Northwest College in Kirkland, Washington. All participants gave remarkably imaginative class segments on topics ranging from the session on Renaissance Music and Place with the personal topic on Power in Gabrieli’s Venice; the Baroque Sense of Drama: Barbara Strozzi and the structural dynamic of the Italian cantata; Continuities and Discontinuities: Brahms and Schoenberg. In the session on American Music: Gumbo or Tossed Salad? (Crawford), one participant discussed Foster, populist and genius, another presented on Billings, recollection and revolution, and still another on Crumb, body and soul. Suffice it to say that the individual directed herself toward an engagement with the topic as also with a telling repertory from the teaching anthologies. Ten minutes were allowed each speaker six participants worked with a coordinator in each subgroup. Every participant had received free copies of all leading textbooks, CD sets, and anthologies, which the Director had requested from the publishers.

One participating colleague remarked how the seminar provoked “thinking outside the box in technique and philosophies. Subtle and imaginative thinking are important.” Rather a few noted the ease and consistency with which speakers and enrolled colleagues interacted, a measured pace during the Institute that allowed reflection alongside formal presentations, and the opportunity to compare problems

and solutions with colleagues from many callings. Representing most participants, another concluded, “I would whole-heartedly recommend the CMS Institute for Music History Pedagogy, one of the most valuable experiences for teaching I have had. Please consider this an ongoing Institute.” Thus, it seems certain that the innovative questions raised will demand addressing further, that related seminars are requisite, and that the Institute stirred and convinced participants that they must look broadly and evolve continuously as undergraduate music history teachers.

