

The Counterpoint Club

A Chamber Music Podcast



Teacher Guide

Opus 2, Episodes 1-5

Teacher Guide: Opus 2

This Teacher Guide is designed as a companion resource for Opus 2 of The Counterpoint Club (TCC) podcast, a program of Chamber Music Madness (CMM), a non-profit organization based in Seattle, WA. The 5 episodes of Opus 1 of TCC were originally designed as a screen-free virtual replacement for Tuned In! 2020, the week-long summer chamber music camp normally led each July by Skyros Quartet, Artistic Director for CMM. Opus 2 is the virtual offering for the fall semester of ECCHO (Emerald City Chamber Music Organization), the in-school chamber music program led by Skyros. While we are only able to offer ECCHO to schools in the greater Puget Sound region, TCC is freely available to anyone around the world.

Each of the 5 episodes of Opus 2 is centered around a concept in chamber music performance. They are 45 to 60 minutes in length and follow a similar format: a history segment, a technique lesson, a question and answer session, and a guest interview, along with some fun extra content along the way. There's also a companion TCC blog post for each episode, available on the TCC website, thecounterpointclub.org. The blog features additional music examples, unabridged versions of the guest interviews, and downloadable worksheets with step-by-step guides for the exercises from each technique lesson. While consecutive episodes follow a logical order, any episode can be used as a stand-alone module for teaching purposes.

The Teacher Guide provides ideas for how middle and high school music teachers (band, orchestra, or choir) can use TCC as part of online learning and distance coursework. Please note that these materials are intended for students approximately in 8th grade and older. While Skyros, the creators of TCC, is a string quartet and the content and guests largely center on string instruments and repertoire, the content is all easily adaptable to any music discipline. The Teacher Guide features three brief lesson plans for each episode that can be completed by students after listening to an episode. The first lesson plan is a group activity that an entire large ensemble class can participate in together. The second is designed for small breakout groups of about 4 to 6 students to work on together. The third activity is designed for a student to complete individually.

At the end of this document, you'll also find a few lesson ideas for assignments that are not specific to any of the episodes.

These activities are suggestions. Please feel free to use them as written, adjust as needed, or create your own activities based on our content! And if you do, please share them with us. We would be so glad to hear about how you are able to use TCC in your classes! This content is completely free for you to use and share with your colleagues. If you use any of this content in your classes, we do ask for a simple favor: let us know what you think! **We've got a simple Teacher Feedback Questionnaire about TCC here.** We would be delighted to have your feedback on The Counterpoint Club, and hear how you are using it in your classroom. Teacher feedback and testimonials are really important to us, and help us in creating more episodes of the podcast in the future!



Episode 1: Got Folk?!

Summary:

The Skyros Quartet begins the second season, or Opus 2, of The Counterpoint Club with an exploration of the influence of folk music in chamber music composition and performance. Featuring special guest: The Gothard Sisters

Description:

The Skyros Quartet begins the journey into a new Opus of The Counterpoint Club by exploring the ways that folk music has influenced chamber music, both in composition and in performance. In the history lesson, Brandon discusses ethnomusicology and the ways that composers have incorporated folk melodies in music meant for the concert stage. In the technique segment, Sarah explores methods for researching these influences and how to inform an audience to their usage and existence. With training in both classical and Celtic music, our special guests Greta, Willow, and Solana offer fantastic insight on our theme from their expertise as the internationally-acclaimed Gothard Sisters.

- **Full class activity** - Discuss the repertoire of a mainstream classical composer, someone that everyone knows like Beethoven or Brahms. Look at different influences on their compositions, such as what might have been happening in their personal lives, national politics, or popular music of their era and how these influences affected individual compositions.
- **Small group activity** - Select a piece of pop music, discussing parallel elements from classical music that appear in the pop piece. Each group presents their findings to the class, highlighting items such as pulse, rhythm, time signature, key signature, modulation, chords and chord progressions.
- **Individual assignment** - Using the worksheet, prepare a short pre-performance teaching-artist style talk about a piece of music, perhaps a piece the orchestra is working on, a chamber work, or a solo work.

Episode 2: No Time to Practice

Summary:

The Skyros Quartet explores a topic that is universal to every musician: practice time and how we use it. Featuring special guest: Dr. Molly Gebrian

Description:

Our second episode of The Counterpoint Club Opus 2 is all about maximizing efficiency in practice sessions. Willie tells the surprisingly colorful story of the metronome in the history segment. All four members of Skyros share practice techniques to help you get the most out of your practice time. Practice guru and violist Molly Gebrian joins us in our interview, offering her advice and thoughts on the time we spend alone with our instruments.

- **Full class activity** - Learn basic conducting patterns and techniques together. Using Willie's metronome technique from the episode, have students practice conducting patterns with both a metronome and a recording of music.
- **Small group activity** - Break out into small groups and assign each group a difficult passage, either selected from a piece they're currently working on, or handpicked by the teacher. Have each group brainstorm a technique for their assigned passage, and select a representative from that group to explain their technique and lead a sectional and/or full rehearsal. It's okay if some practice techniques are repeated. If students are not able to gather in person, each group could create a written and/or oral presentation and demonstration of their practice technique to share via zoom and/or other online sharing platforms.
- **Individual assignment** - Using the Hourglass worksheet, write a practice journal or log that details one's practice on a passage. Ask the student to select a work/passage, and plan out the middle of the Hourglass in their journal after the initial runthrough. At the end of the journal, the student should include reflections like how the process went, what improvements and changes they observed between the two run-throughs, and what areas they still feel need more work in their next practice session.

Episode 3: Playin' from the HIP

Summary:

Skyros explores the intersection of Historically Informed Performance and Chamber Music. Featuring violinist and first Baroque Artist recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant: Rachell Wong.

Description:

In the third episode of *The Counterpoint Club Opus 2*, we introduce an important approach to performance that has sprung up over the past thirty to forty years, called HIP, or Historically Informed Performance. Sarah discusses both the history and philosophy of HIP, as well as how HIP has directly influenced her as an artist. Brandon uses a modern score of a Corelli Trio Sonata as a practical example of how to apply the methods of HIP to music of a different era. Finally, our special guest, Baroque violinist Rachell Wong, talks about her career as a HIP performer, and also shares some useful insight into the relationship between performance and sports psychology.

- **Full class activity** - Discuss the history of our modern tuning system based on A440, listening to examples of music recorded at different A's. Explore how we eventually settled on A440 as the general world standard, and look at contemporary ensembles who use other As.
- **Small group activity** - Break the ensemble up by instrument. Have each section research the evolution of their instrument, looking at how the instrument has changed over the last several centuries into its current form, and how technique has changed as well. Ask students to describe ways they might incorporate aspects from different eras into their contemporary instruments and techniques to approximate the sound of a period instrument.
- **Individual assignment** - Ask students to compare expressive markings from two different eras, in either solo piece repertoire or excerpts from large ensemble pieces you are currently studying. Choose two pieces from contrasting eras, or have the students choose two contrasting era pieces from their own solo/ensemble repertoire.

Ask students to research the meaning of the titles, tempo markings, and articulations, based on what historians know about the era in which it was composed (e.g. baroque, classical, etc.). Multi-lingual dictionaries and a thorough encyclopedia should suffice as reference resources. Have each student submit a practice recording of them comparing two specific markings, such as the differences (or similarities!) between staccato dots in the two selections, how to interpret a classical era forte to a romantic era forte, or vibrato usage in different genres.

Episode 4: How to Train Your String Quartet

Summary:

The Skyros Quartet investigates innovations in how chamber music is taught and how an evolution in pedagogy elevated the genre to its current standards. Featuring special guests: James Dunham and Annie Fullard.

Description:

Chamber music had its roots as a pastime for amateurs relaxing together in their homes and palaces, so how did it become a career path for professionals? The culture of chamber music has been through a seismic shift since its early days, largely because of how the tradition has been passed from one generation to the next. We look at the renaissance of this transfer of knowledge in the past few generations by talking with some of the performer pedagogues who are fundamental to its evolution. We also discuss how this shapes the future of learning chamber music. Now more than ever, there are resources available to young musicians who dream of pursuing chamber music as a career, and amateurs who want to deepen their chamber music experience.

- **Full class activity** - On a white board, lead class through a brainstorming session listing important roles members of an ensemble need to take on, and why these roles are important to its functioning. (Examples: scheduler, music librarian, bookkeeper, marketer, concert coordinator).
- **Small group activity** - Divide students into mixed instrument ensembles (varying sizes are ok). Have each group develop a presentation that describes what a career might look like for their ensemble. Imagination is key with this exercise, and there are no 'correct' career paths. Students can be as inventive with their presentation as possible, but at a minimum should answer the following questions for their ensembles: 1) What their name would be, 2) What genre of music they would play, 3) What their dream career would look like, 4) What type of training/formal education would be either required or helpful to achieving success for their ensemble.
- **Individual assignment** - Student researches chamber music ensembles, choosing a group they strongly identify with, and answers the following: 1) What is it about the group that speaks to them, 2) Brief biography of the group 3) Specific recordings, concerts, projects created by the group that are of particular interest to the student, 4) Inspiring aspects of the ensemble that the student would like to emulate in their own artistry.

Episode 5: Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman

Summary:

Skyros Quartet takes a look at the integral role of women in the development of the chamber music genre, and the continuation of women composing for chamber ensembles. Featuring special guest: composer and professor Dr. Kaley Lane Eaton

Description:

Unlike other genres of Western classical music like orchestras or solo performing, women have always had an important role in the development of chamber music. Sarah describes the history of women in chamber music and steps toward a more equitable future. Willie guides us through the steps we take in Skyros Quartet to include diversity in every program and resources to help others do the same. Sarah has a conversation with composer Kaley Lane Eaton about the challenges and opportunities for women in composition.

- **Full class activity** - Host a “Women in Music” trivia night for students. This can be done at the culmination of the other small group and/or individual assignments.
- **Small group activity** - Create a short group presentation on a woman composer, looking at information like biography, influences and inspirations in her compositions, and her body of work.
- **Individual assignment** - Research and select a specific piece of music by a woman, either a solo piece the student might learn by themselves, or a small ensemble piece. Write a short statement about what the student enjoys about the work, and discusses why it is an important work that should in their opinion, be part of the standard repertoire.

General Assignments

These assignments are unrelated to any specific episode. Some are smaller and will take just a few minutes from students, while others are more large-scale projects.

- **As a class, create your own episode of The Counterpoint Club.** Choose a theme for your episode and divide your class into small groups, of about 4-6. Each group is responsible for a different segment of the episode: history lesson, technique lesson, quiztime, guest interview, Q and A, all based on the theme or topic. Each group is responsible for recording and editing their content, which is then compiled together to create an episode. You can even assign one group to write and record a simple musical theme. In addition to the knowledge gained from researching and recording each segment, students will learn a bit about audio production, sound editing, and layering musical tracks (if one group is making theme music). These are all skills that Skyros had to learn and develop to create the podcast as well! (If you do this, let us know and share the result with us!)
- **Begin a discussion in the comments section of a TCC blog post** about the content in that episode, including student reactions to musical examples in the post/episode, or related content to the topic. Skyros will do our best to chime in to these conversations as well!
- **Submit a question to Skyros for the Q and A section of the podcast.** We'll try to feature answers to as many questions as we can in future episodes. Please note that if we do feature a student's question in an episode, we'll supply a release form giving us permission from the student (if age 18 or older) or their parents/guardians permission (if under age 18) to use their voice in a TCC podcast.