ChoralQuest™

Lesson: Write Your Own Program Notes

OVERVIEW

Writing program notes is a way for students to integrate musical knowledge with inquiry and writing skills. This activity requires the students to analyze music, conduct research, and organize, synthesize, and edit information to create written text. Considering the musical components and the context in which the piece was created enhances students' understanding of the music.

Students use a template to find and organize information that is used to create program notes for pieces that will be presented in a public performance by the choir.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will:
- Identify the various types of information presented in concert program notes.
- Use technology and print media to locate information to complete a template.
- Examine the historical/cultural context of music they are performing.
- Examine the formal properties of music they are performing.
- Describe music using appropriate technical terminology.
- Organize and edit information to create program notes.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- A word processing program
- Internet and books for research

Student copies of:
- Program Notes Activity reading
- *Thinking of My Home* Program Notes and other pieces to use as examples
- Program Notes Research Worksheet (six pages)

PROCESS

Students may be asked to write program notes that describe the entire piece or just one section of a piece. Students who work on this activity will need guidance from their teacher, especially analyzing the form and other distinctive characteristics of the music. They will also need to be directed towards appropriate resources to discover historical or cultural influences of the pieces they are studying. Some training in basic research techniques and use of the Internet to access websites may be required.

Consider collaborating with English, Communications, Writing, or Media teachers in order to assign this activity as an interdisciplinary project that addresses the content and standards of multiple classes.

A description of the activity and templates that guide the students in gathering and organizing their information are provided and may be printed for classroom use.

1. Distribute and read the document *Program Note Activity*.

2. Read program notes for *Through All Things* and other pieces and identify the kinds of information contained within the examples. This can be done as a large group activity. Use the categories from the Program Note Activity description.

3. Select a piece that will be performed for an upcoming public performance. The pieces may also be assigned to ensure that equal numbers of students are creating program notes for each programmed piece. This will be especially important if you decide to extend the activity.

4. Used the template provided to research and categorize information about the selected piece.

5. Analyze the form of the selected piece. Students will probably need assistance with this. The form may be best analyzed as a large group activity with guidance from the teacher.

6. Use the information to write program notes for the selected piece.

EXTENTION
Have students create their own Concert Program for family and friends. See the lesson plan *Creating a Concert Program* below.

Program Note Activity
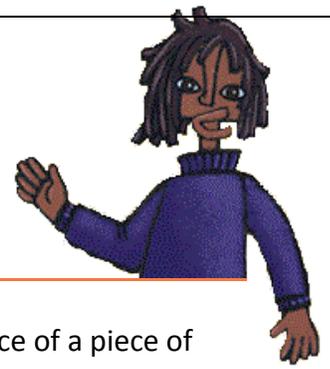
Program notes help to prepare listeners to hear a live or recorded performance of a piece of music. The program notes may contain a variety of information, such as:

1. **A description of the structure** of the music – form, distinctive musical elements used in the piece (key signature, scales, rhythms, tempo markings, etc.) or instrumentation;
2. **Moods or emotions** that the composer intends the listeners to experience;
3. **Stories, pictures, or ideas** that are represented in the music;
4. **Ideas or events** that inspired the creation of the piece (a poem, war, space travel, dinosaurs, etc.);
5. **Information about the history or culture** from when or where the music comes;
6. **Style or genre** (type) of music (swing, rock, showtune); or
7. **Biographical** information about the composer.

The best program notes contain information from more than one of the categories listed above. You will have to do some research to do a thorough job on this activity. (Hint: Many composers now have websites that provide biographical information.) The attached packet will help you to collect and organize the information that you will need to write your program notes. It is not important that you find something to fill in every blank, but you will want to find enough information to make your programs notes thorough, interesting, and informative for your audience.

Thinking of My Home Program Notes

Here is what composer Chen Yi wrote about *Thinking of My Home*:

Commissioned by the American Composers Forum (ACF) as a part of its ChoralQuest® Program, Thinking of My Home for treble clef choir and optional piano sets a famous ancient Chinese poem with the same title by Li Bai in the Tang Dynasty to music. It was my privilege to have such great opportunity to work together with ACF and the lovely students in the Frontier Trail Middle School Choir, guided by their wonderful and enthusiastic director Gretchen Harrison during my creation of the work. Our piece was premiered by at the FTMS in Olathe, Kansas, on May 5, 2015.

This choral work by Chen Yi takes it's gentle and beautiful lyrics from an ancient poem by Li Bai, a highly revered Chinese poet from the Tang Dynasty (618–907 C.E.). There are many translations of the poem. The version used by Chen Yi is taught to school children all across present-day China. The song opens with two Chinese words: *Yeu* (moon) and *Ye* (night). This simple Chinese text sets the

Frontier Trail Middle School Choir

mood for the song. The lyrics continue with an English translation of Li Bai's poem:

> *Moonlight in front of my bed,*
> *Is it frost on the ground I guess?*
> *Lifting up my eyes, gazing at the moon,*
> *Low down my head, thinking of my home.*

The reflective mood of the first section of the song gives way to the uplifting melodies and stronger dynamics of the middles section as the poet raises his eyes to gaze at the moon. In the final section, the quieter, reflective mood returns as the poet and the composer provide warm thoughts with some wistful longing for home.

Thinking of My Home was commissioned by the American Composers Forum for its ChoralQuest® series of new works for Middle School Choirs.

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Program Notes Research Worksheet

Name:_____

Composer and Publisher Information
Title of composition:
Name of composer:
Name of arranger (if applicable):
Year piece was composed:

Structure and Style Information
Form of piece (ABA, Rondo, Theme & Variations, etc.):
Genre (Folk Song, Symphony, Showtune, etc.):
Style (Swing, Rock, etc.):

Musical Elements

What distinctive musical elements are used in the piece (melody, harmony, rhythm, expressive qualities, articulations, instrumentation) and where are they located in the music? (If you need more room to write, use the back side of this page.)

Historic/Cultural/Social Information

During what historical period was the piece composed? Where and when might the music have been performed? Who performed the music – trained musicians or everyone in the community? How does the music reflect the culture, society, or time period? (If you need more room to write, use the back side of this page.)

Feelings/Stories/Emotions/Events

What feelings, emotions, stories, or events are being conveyed in the music? (If you need more room to write, use the back side of this page.)

Composer Biographical Information

You may want to do an internet search to see if the composer has a website. (If you need more room to write, use the back side of this page.)

Resources —Info from the title page of the book, websites:

Authors	Copyright	Title	City: Name of Publish

Topic	Web Site Address

Extension Lesson: Creating a Concert Program

OVERVIEW

A project where students use the information they have researched to create a concert program for family and friends who will be attending the concert.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will:
1. Identify the components of a concert program.
2. Work collaboratively with peers.
3. Create a concert program that includes all appropriate components.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

1. Student-created program notes from the previous lesson
2. Personal Concert Program Activity reading
3. Access to a shared text file of a roster of student performers
4. A word processing program
5. Access to clip art or pictures
6. Concert Program Template

PROCESS

The teacher will need to provide either access to a shared file that contains a roster of the student names in each performing group or a printed copy of the roster. It will also be easier for students to assemble their program notes into one concert program if they have saved their work on a shared file or a flash drive.

A template may be printed a provided to the students to use as a checklist to ensure that they have included all the components of the concert program.

1. Assign students to groups. Each group should be comprised of students who have all been assigned different pieces on the concert program so that all together the group represents all of the pieces on the program (at the end of the activity, you should have one full concert program per student group.)

2. As a class or small group, have students read the [Personal Concert Program Activity](#) description.

3. Have students examine past concert programs to see what information is provided and how it is presented. To guide their work, students may consider the questions posed in the Personal Program Activity reading.

4. Using the Program Notes developed previously, have students enter their work into the Concert Program Template document found in the "Lesson Plans with Interdisciplinary Connections" folder of this curriculum.

5. Once each group has a completed Concert Program, photocopy each group's concert programs.

6. Share Concert Programs with friends and family who attend the concert.

Personal Concert Program Activity

A concert program provides information to guide the listening of the audience. You have examined program notes and created your own. Now you will share your work with other students who have created program notes for other pieces that will be performed in your upcoming concert. Together you will create your own personal concert program to be shared with your family and friends who will attend the concert.

As you look at past programs from both school and other concerts to see what information is included, make a list, thinking about the following questions:

1. Whose names appear on the program? Can you tell who composed the music? Who directed the group? Who are the performers? Were there any soloists or performers who were featured? Is anyone listed who somehow supported the performance in some way, even though he or she didn't perform during the concert?

2. What information is included about the performance that lets the audience know they are in the right place at the right time?

3. Are there any pictures or graphics on the program? If so, do they provide information or relate to a theme?

Use the model that is provided to make sure you include all the important information. See if you can find graphics or pictures to make the program look more artistic, highlight a theme, or provide an example of something mentioned in the program notes for one or more of the pieces on the program.

Concert Program Template: Be sure to include all of the following information:

Name of Event

Date and Time

Location of Event

Name of Performing Group

Name of Director

Title of Piece...Name of Composer/Arranger ....
....
....
....
....
....
.... Name of Composer/Arranger

Program Notes

Title of Piece... Name of Composer/Arranger

Program Notes

Name of Performing Group

Name of Director

Title of Piece... Name of Composer/Arranger

Program Notes

Title of Piece... Name of Composer/Arranger

Program Notes

Roster of Performers

Acknowledgments

(Don't forget to include graphics, clipart, or pictures)