

A Guide to Writing Program Notes

Purpose

While many program notes aim to inform audiences comprised mostly of musical amateurs, these program notes should aim at a more musically educated audience. However, you should not go into long discussions of form or involved descriptions of harmonic events. Try to tread a middle ground.

Length

You should aim at ca. 2-4 paragraphs for each piece.

Research and Analysis

You must do some research and analysis before you write the program notes. Standard research tools, such as *Grove Online*, *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, and *Baker's Biographical Dictionary*, can be supplemented by more specific sources. You should not use websites like Wikipedia, but you may use websites sanctioned by reputable educational institutions or musical societies. In most cases, these sites have a suffix of either .edu or .org.

Plagiarism

The program notes must represent your own work. It is not necessary to cite your sources as you would in a research paper, but if you quote from a source you must cite it (author and title in parentheses). The idea is to do research, internalize the information, and then put it in your own words.

Writing Style

These program notes should be written in a scholarly, yet interesting, style. They should avoid excessive musical jargon and should not use slang or colloquialisms. They should also be proofread carefully before submitted.

What to include

- Biographical information on the composer as it pertains to the piece
- Historical information, if applicable
- Analysis aimed at a musically educated audience, as indicated above
- Programmatic features, if applicable

- Information about your arrangement, if you are a jazz student
- Other interesting or important facts, e. g., about the first performance

Texts and Translations

If the work has words, include the text, and also the translation if the piece is in a foreign language.

Musical Titles

Please refer to the guidelines presented in MUH 5300 (Music Research) for titles of musical works.

Style Manuals that contain chapters about program notes

Richard J. Wingell, *Writing about Music: An Introductory Guide*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2009).

Jonathan Bellman, *A Short Guide to Writing about Music*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007).

General Style Manual

Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Deadline

The program notes must be approved by your advisor and given to the Graduate Officer at least three weeks before the recital.