OUTLINE

1. Resources
2. Citation style
3. Writing style
4. Note structure
5. Questions
RESOURCES

- http://libguides.usask.ca/music/programnotes
CITATION STYLE

- Chicago 16th ed
- Chicago Style for Music guide
PURPOSE OF PROGRAM NOTES

- Increase the audience members’ understanding of the music and enjoyment of the concert
- To give the audience a more engaging or interactive concert experience
INCLUDE INFORMATION ABOUT…

- the composer
- the work itself (proper title, op. number, composition dates, premier dates)
- the context of the work in both history and music history
- what the audience should listen for during the performance
- how the performer interprets the work
WRITING STYLE – THINGS TO AVOID

- Too formal
- Too informal or flowery
- Talking down to the audience
- Humour (use with caution!)
- Overusing technical terms
- Detailed analysis of the piece
- Chronological narration
The descriptive programme note offers great opportunities for bad writers and poor musicians to show what havoc they can make of English prose. The writers who describe symphonies as if they were sunsets or battles, or election conflicts between the good and evil parties in the Universe, are useless to everybody, and positively harmful to those who are seriously trying to understand the art of music. But those who eschew all descriptions of this sort and give merely a dry technical analysis are, in my opinion, just as remote from the useful function of the annotator and critic.

W. J. Turner. Facing the Music: Reflections of a Music Critic (Bell, 1933)
ELEMENTS OF PROGRAM NOTES
(BELLMAN)
NOTE STRUCTURE (SCAIFE)

1. Introduction to the Composer
2. Information about the work’s historical context and circumstances surrounding its composition
3. Description of the work itself

NOTE STRUCTURE USING THE INVERTED PYRAMID

"The Lead": The most important info
Approximately 30 words (1-2 thin paragraphs)
May include a "hook" (provocative quote or question)

"The Body": The crucial info
Argument, Controversy, Story, Issue
Evidence, background, details, logic, etc.
Quotes, photos, video, and audio that support, dispute, expand the topic

"The Tail": extra info
Interesting/Related items
May include extra context
In blogs, columns, and other editorials: the assessment of the journalist
1) Broad introduction: look at the work through the cultural context or frame it with another common work of the time

2) General biographical background on the composer

3) Specific information about the work
QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- When was the composer born? When did they die?
- Where was the composer born?
- For what is the composer best known?
- What is the composer's most significant contribution to music history?
QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT CULTURAL CONTEXT

- What other works did the composer write in the same/similar genre(s)?
- When was the piece written?
- What else was going on in the composer's life or in the world around him/her when they were writing the piece?
- What was going on in the world at that time?
QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT STYLE & AFFECT

- What are the movement names?
- What form or musical structure is being used in this piece or movement? (e.g. sonata, ABA form, etc.)
- Is there any terminology or lingo that needs to be explained? (e.g. definition of passacaglia or scherzo)
- What should the audience member listen for in the piece or movement?
WRITING TIPS

- Use capitals for:
  - Musical periods (Renaissance) but not for adjectives (romantic expression)
  - Adjectives derived from proper names (Mozartian)
  - Specific titles (First Piano Concerto) but not general titles (Beethoven's piano concertos)
  - Titles of movements (Adagio)

- Use italics for:
  - Titles of books and musical works (operas, symphonic poems)
  - Dynamics and abbreviations
  - Foreign terms or short phrases that have not been adopted into English (con sordino, lamentoso)

- Use normal type with single quotation marks for:
  - titles of single songs, motets, madrigals, etc.
  - Nicknames applied to instrumental works ('Moonlight' Sonata)
RESEARCH

- Key research resources may include:
  - Grove Music Online
  - Composer biographies (ML 410)
  - Journal databases
  - Liner notes

- Contemporary composers:
  - Composer's website
  - Liner notes
  - Score
  - Association website (e.g. Canadian Music Centre)

- http://libguides.usask.ca/music/programnotes