

Project Abstract

“An Investigation into American Piano Repertoire of the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries”

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I propose to research and compile the American classical piano repertoire of the late 20th and early 21st century, with an emphasis on music suitable for study by undergraduate music majors. This project will fill a void in the current literature. Anthologies of late 20th/early 21st century American piano music are extremely limited; at present, I know of no comprehensive collection of this type. Additionally, it is widely accepted that university piano students in the United States have a major educational deficiency in this topic. Through this project, I will remedy this problem by creating an anthology for college-level pianists.

University of Idaho music students will benefit directly from this research, through a proposed special topics course to be offered in fall of 2012. However, with my intention to eventually develop this research into articles, CD recordings, and a textbook suitable for undergraduate course study, the potential benefits of this work extend beyond the University of Idaho. Especially given the cultural and historical relevance of the topic, it is an important addition to current American music research, and will serve as the foundation for me to achieve a successful career in higher education at the national level.

Narrative and Proposal Details

Introduction

I propose to research and compile American classical piano repertoire of the late 20th and early 21st century, emphasizing music suitable for study by undergraduate music majors. Such anthologies are extremely limited; at present, I know of no collection of this type. The closest, *The Carnegie Hall Millennium Piano Book*,¹ does not focus solely on American composers and is quite challenging for the average university piano student. College-level pianists and teachers who are interested in this repertoire often have trouble finding music suitable for their level. This leads to an educational deficiency. Research supports this, indicating that truly contemporary music is often neglected in formal piano study. For example, Colleen Hunter's 1993 dissertation study analyzed repertoire performed in piano degree recitals in nine schools across the nation, finding that compositions written since 1940 were noticeably neglected in performance.²

I intend to address this by creating a comprehensive anthology of contemporary American piano music, suited for the college-level pianist. The research undertaken to compile this anthology will also lead to a variety of performances, publications, and lectures, which are described in more detail in the following section.

Project Activities

To gather the greatest number of possible music scores for this project, I plan to conduct a nationwide survey of university piano faculty. This will collect data on pieces and composers that have proven most effective with students around the country, a topic about which current information is sorely lacking. I am requesting a student research assistant to help with survey development and implementation, and with gathering and cataloging of this music. This will provide the student with valuable experience both in conducting research in music, and in learning to evaluate and categorize large numbers of musical scores.

My background in both performance and pedagogy will enable me to evaluate these scores and determine which are appropriate for college-level pianists. Once the repertoire is selected, I will embark on a time of intense musical study, developing an in-depth understanding of each piece through private lessons with prominent contemporary music concert pianists around the country, such as Ursula Oppens and Marilyn Nonken in New York, James Giles and Sylvia Wang in Chicago, Stephen Drury in Boston, Gloria Cheng in Los Angeles, Sarah Cahill in San Francisco, and David Korevaar in Boulder, Colorado. This is a key component of the research project, as this one-on-one interaction will provide me with not only a broad national perspective on the repertoire, but also a personal relationship with these preeminent musicians. This professional network will provide career benefits for many years beyond the grant.

The private study will culminate in my attendance at the New England Conservatory of Music's Summer Institute for Contemporary Performance Practice 2012,³ an intensive performance seminar on contemporary music, performance practice, and compositional trends.

¹ *The Carnegie Hall Millennium Piano Book*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 2000.

² Hunter, Colleen Marie (1993). A study of repertoire performed in degree recitals by piano performance majors at selected United States schools of music. D.M.A. dissertation, University of Missouri - Kansas City, United States -- Missouri.

³ <http://necmusic.edu/ce/sicpp>

As a result of this multi-faceted research, my anthology will be supplemented with historical background, pedagogical and performance suggestions and musical commentary.

This research will be also developed into several lecture-recitals, focusing on specific pieces, composers, or musical and compositional trends. These lecture-recitals will be performed at the University of Idaho and other local, national, and international venues. Additionally, I intend for my research to lead, in future years, to publication of a book, detailing the history and significance of the late 20th/early 21st century American piano repertoire, composers and musical and compositional trends. It will be geared toward the college-level pianist and teacher, and will serve as a text for piano literature or music history classes. Throughout the process of writing, I will submit essays and chapters for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Finally, this project will result in a new upper-level course for undergraduate and graduate music students. This course will be initially offered as a special topics course in the fall of 2012.

Timeline

My project will be carried out between July 2011, and August 2012. During the first summer and the fall semester I will complete the survey of university piano faculty, will compile scores for the musical anthology, and will conduct preliminary academic research. The spring 2012 will be devoted to in-depth study of the music, with a large portion of time spent learning to play selected compositions. I will also write an article related to my research, to be submitted for publication to peer-reviewed journals by the fall of 2012. During the second summer, I will conduct research trips for private study with the aforementioned concert pianists. By the end of the summer, I will have completed a first draft of the musical anthology, and will begin readying it for publication. In the spring and summer of 2012, I will develop my research into a university course, to be offered at the University of Idaho during the fall of 2012. Finally, I will combine my research and music study into a lecture-recital related to my topic, to be presented at the University of Idaho in the fall of 2012.

Contribution to Field and Benefit to the Principal Investigator

This project fills a major void in the piano literature. As mentioned, there are currently no similar resources available and, especially given the cultural and historical relevance of the topic, it is an important addition to current American music research. This project also addresses a gap in undergraduate music education, with specific benefits to students at the University of Idaho through a proposed special topics course and lecture-recital performance. However, with my intention to eventually develop this research into articles, CD recordings, and a textbook, the potential benefits of this work extend far beyond the University of Idaho.

The multi-faceted nature of this project will enable me to achieve visibility in a broad range of academic and professional venues. As someone who holds degrees in both Piano Performance and Piano Pedagogy from a conservatory music school within a major research institution, I am in a unique position in the field of classical piano. I have the desire and the ability to not only perform contemporary piano repertoire at the highest level, but also to focus on issues of music education and to address academic research from the perspective of a scholar, a performer, and a pedagogue. Completing this project will help establish me on the national stage, and will serve as the foundation for a successful career in higher music education.