MCGY5610 – Week 6 – Program Notes

Starts with the concert program...
In your case: decide how many pieces, how long?

Devising a Concert Program
• Purpose of the concert – prep for exam, comp, festive occ., anniversary
• Anticipated audience
• Logistical issues – hall, size (hall & stage), acoustics, piano, sun(!), floor(vc!)
• Specific rationale for choice of works
• Stylistic contrast/homogeneity

Aims of Program Notes
• Interest and engage the listener
• Encourage astute listening
• Provide information regarding the 1) works performed 2) performers
• Provide information required by the composer – HIP, modern music

Writing Program Notes
Consider who your readers will be, including
  o The level of musical literacy and knowledge
  o What style of writing, type of information would be most engaging

• Required Information
  1. Composer name and date
  2. Title of work, key, opus number, nickname, date of composition
  3. Names of solo performers with instruments played
  4. Names of performers in small chamber groups
  5. Name of orchestra, choir etc., with name of conductor
  6. Details of venue, date and time
  7. Any vocal texts used in works performed
  8. Any program for the work required by the composer
  9. In our days: Sponsors...
  10. In our days: Advertisements

• Structure
  o Each work may be considered separately OR
  o Works may be discussed concurrently, following a common theme or idea

• Categories of content:
  o Opening statement designed to engage the reader’s interest
  o Brief consideration of composer and their oeuvre
  o Discussion of the circumstances of the composition of the work
    Places and dates of composition
Facts re: first performance, commissioning, dedication, revisions etc.
Information on the composer’s motivations, influences
How the work contributes to the history of the genre, style etc.
  o Consideration of historical, cultural, social contexts
  o Description of aspects of the work itself
    Some discussion of form
    Significant moments to listen for
  o Particular aspects of the performance of the work at this concert
  o Concluding remarks??
  o Last performance of this work...

Referencing in Program Notes
  • Referencing of sources may be done as part of the narrative of the notes, e.g. “In his book, Brahms: A Critical Study, Burnett James states…”
  • Use of footnotes may also be appropriate – not often
  • Be aware of the importance of academic honesty

https://www.sydneysymphony.com/about-us/publications/program-library

Summary: Your program notes should
  • Be formatted similar to the manner of a simple concert program, including a title page giving full details of the works
  • Have a clearly defined structure making appropriate use of headings and subheadings where required
  • Appropriately reference sources used. This may be done via:
    o Acknowledgment of the author and title of a source within the prose of your notes
    o The use of footnotes in the Chicago style
  • Include a reference list of sources from which information has been drawn
  • Include a brief section at the end, explaining your choice of works for the Program