**Guidelines for Program Notes Project:**

**Due date: Tuesday November 26th (or sent by email before due date)**

1. Minimum 150 words. Maximum 300 words. Complete sentences.
2. Must include information about the composer:
   1. Year of birth and death if no longer living
   2. Important events of his/her life
3. Information about the piece
   1. Date written
   2. Important or interesting facts about the piece
   3. Description of the feeling or mood of the piece
4. An interesting aspect of the piece for the audience to listen or watch for.
5. The best efforts will be chosen to be included in our printed concert program.

**A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO WRITING PROGRAM NOTES**

**STEP 1: What Kinds of Information Should I Put in My Program Notes?**

Good quality program notes give your audience information about any combination of the following:

* the composer
* the piece itself
* how the piece relates to history and music history
* how the piece will sound

**STEP 2: Getting Organized**

Many people find it helpful to organize program notes into three sections\*:

* Brief introduction to the composer
* Information about the piece’s history and the circumstances surrounding its composition
* Description of the piece itself

**STEP 3: Getting Background Information**

**Questions to Ask:**

* 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 important contribution to music history?
* What other works did the composer write in the same/similar style?
* 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?

**Sources to Use to Find the Answers:**

* **Google (yes--Google!)**

One way to start is to search for the composer and/or piece using Google. I have provided you with links to websites with information on each piece we are singing and its composer or arranger.

* **Composer Biographies and websites**

Biographies give much more detailed and comprehensive information about a composer, their life, works, styles, impact, etc.

Often, late 20th century composers will have information about themselves and their works on their websites. This is especially helpful when a search in Oxford Music fails.

**STEP 4: Filling in the Details**

**Questions to Ask:**

* What form or musical structure is being used in this piece or movement? (Strophic- verse and refrain, ABA form, or through-composed - see me for help)
* Is there any terminology or lingo that needs to be explained?
* What should the audience member listen for in the piece or movement?
* Study the music score. Are you able to tell what the form is? Can you identify specific sections?

**STEP 5: Making it Personal**

If it seems appropriate, add some remarks about your personal experience with the piece.

**Sources to Use:**

* **Your Personal Practice Sessions**

While you are practicing, think about and write down your personal ideas about the work. (e.g. what you think of when you perform it, how you think of the structure, etc.)

* **Listening**

If you haven't yet, listen to the piece, as this can give you a more objective view of the work. Most of these you can find on YouTube.com

**STEP 6: Citing your sources**

Anytime you use something that is not your own, original thought, you must cite it.

* Composer biographies found on the Web

If you find a composer's bio on the web, you may use it if copyright permits. You must cite the website from which you obtained it. (Be sure that it is an accurate website about that composer first!)

My source for this information: <http://www.lib.umd.edu/guides/recitalistguide.html#section4>

**WHY DO WE WRITE PROGRAM NOTES?**

To give the audience interesting and helpful information about the pieces we are performing as well as something to read while they wait for the program to begin.

**What does a performer get out of writing program notes?**   
While the main "consumer" of program notes is the concert audience, writing notes for the works you perform deeply enriches your performance experience.

**What are program notes?**   
A good set of program notes will do two essential things:

1)  **Give the audience a sense of the work's history:** facts of a work's creation, the dates of composition and first performance, where and by whom it was first performed, and some details of composer biography,

2)  **Give the audience a sense of what to expect while hearing the piece.** Like a good "tour guide," you point out the overall form of the piece, describe the mood or feeling of various parts, and point out interesting aspects.

**Format, Length, and Style**   
Actually the two elements given above are a nice general outline for most program notes: start with information on the composer and the history of the piece, and work your way towards the piece itself.

There is no set length for program notes...aside from the ones I'm assigning you to write for my class: A short paragraph with at least 150 words but no more than 500. This is not a research paper. It is not necessary to cite sources unless you are using a direct quote.

Keep in mind that you're writing for a group of interested and generally well-educated.

**Plagiarism**   
It's just as wrong to steal other’s work in program note writing as it is any other form of writing. Please don’t cut and paste material from websites and present it as your own. Bear in mind that anytime you do this, you are stealing—intellectual theft is no different than any other kind. Program notes are going to be a summary of information from elsewhere in your own words, unless you're using a direct quote.

**Sources**   
Here are a few suggested sources of information...

**Composer biographies** - Just cruise Google!  Remember: If there is also an arranger you will need to add information about them as well as the original composer(s).

**Notes on the score** - Some scores will include quite bit of information about the piece: sometimes a program note by the composer, or an indication of who commissioned the work and when it was first performed.

**Online searches** - Several strategies and resources I've found handy:

* On Google – try entering the title and composer and see what comes up. “Snow Day John Jacobsen.” For information on just the composer, type in his/her name.
* For specific piece information you can go to [www.jwpepper.com](http://www.jwpepper.com) and in the search box –the blank box on the left - type the name of the piece. Make sure it’s the correct title and composer and that it is for choir! Sometimes there is a pretty detailed description of the song. Remember to put it in your own words!
* There are increasing numbers of Wikipedia articles dedicated to single pieces.  Handy, but just using like the rest of the web, check your facts carefully.
* You may also run across many sites devoted to a single composer.  Some of these are "fan" sites—fun reading, but not particularly useful stuff.  In other cases, you can find information that is generally true.

My source for this information: <http://facstaff.uww.edu/allsenj/MSO/NOTES/WritingNotes.htm>

Example of program notes:

**Symphony No. 8, “Unfinished”** arr. McCashin

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) is considered to be a leading exponent of the Romantic Era and is one of the most frequently performed composers to this day. The Austrian composer created 600 Lieder (sung works), nine symphonies, liturgical, opera, incidental, chamber and solo piano music, all by the time of his death at the age of 31 in 1828. One of Schubert’s most famous symphonies is the Symphony No. 8 in B minor, better known as the “Unfinished Symphony.” The piece was started in 1822, six years before his death, but there are only two movements known to be completed. The symphony consists of three known movements, the first movement in ¾ time and the second in 3/8 time preceding the unfinished movement, which is composed in ¾ time, but was never given a completed finale. One theory is that the Finale became the B minor entre’acte to Rosamunde, an opera.

Maia Labrie