

The Necessary Skills for Undergraduate Composition Students

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According to James Mobberley,¹ composition pedagogy is an underdeveloped facet of the discipline of music education.² To give some perspective, the National Association of Schools of Music handbook devote just over a half page and 252 words to the Bachelor of Composition degree, while the Bachelor of Music Education degree takes up roughly 6 pages and consists of 2,628 words.³ Based on these numbers one could assert that either NASM put over ten times more thought into music education or composition is a less complex and demanding field of study. The latter assertion should be rejected.

Though there have been legendary composition pedagogues, such as Nadia Boulanger, Arnold Schoenberg, and Paul Hindemith, there seems to be no standard or codified guidelines for composition program curricula. This paper attempts to address this gap in the literature on composition. What do composition students at the college level need to know and be able to do to prepare for a life as a professional composer? Is it possible to have a precise curriculum that does not inhibit the development of one's unique voice?

What was found in the research was both a trans-generational and intra-generational disagreement regarding several aspects of composition pedagogy, including the importance of technique, the importance of proficiency as a performer and improviser, the source of creativity, and more.

This paper will provide a broad and comprehensive perspective of the philosophy and techniques of past and contemporary researchers and practitioners in the field of composition pedagogy. The primary aim of this paper is to elaborate on the skills which experts in the field

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² James Mobberley, "UMKC Composition Workshop" (workshop, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO, June, 2014).

³ National Association of Schools of Music. "Bachelor of Music in Composition" *NASM Handbook 2013-201*: 103; "Bachelor of Music Education" *NASM Handbook 2013-201*: 116-121. Reston, VA, National Association of Schools of Music, 2013.

believe to be necessary for composers to attain. Methodology is generally beyond the scope of this paper, but some primary research on methodology and certain relevant methodological approaches will be addressed. This paper is based on a review of scholarly literature on composition and composition pedagogy.

Composer Skills, Knowledge, and Dispositions

The majority of this paper will focus on the specific compositional techniques and skills that have been deemed necessary by a number of researchers and educators. Also to be addressed are the various dispositions on teaching philosophies among experts in the field.

Developing a Unique Voice

Throughout the literature, the trait most consistently prescribed for success as a composer is a unique voice. Composition is not an interpretive activity like playing the flute or trombone; it is a creative art. The question must be asked: What is a unique voice? Sandra Stauffer writes, “the composer’s identity is made up of the unique qualities of musical sound that allow the informed listener to associate a work with its composer.”⁴ One of the disagreements between various sources is whether or not a unique voice, and hence creativity in general, can truly be taught.

In an article by Daniel Mateos-Moreno, six composers teaching composition as of 2011 from the United Kingdom were interviewed. They all believed that helping their students develop a unique voice is at the core of composition pedagogy.⁵ Conversely, Nadia Boulanger

⁴ Sandra Stauffer, *Why and How to Teach Music Composition*, ed. Maud Hickey (Reston, VA: MENC: The National Association for Music Education, 2003), 91.

⁵ Daniel Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition Today?" *Music Education Research* 13, no. 4 (December 2011): 418, Accessed August 5, 2014, doi:10.1080/14613808.2011.632082. Taylor & Francis Online. Access provided by Central Michigan University.

said, "It is not possible to teach composition, only those things which help us appreciate it."⁶

Why, then, is Boulanger considered to be one of the most legendary composition pedagogues? A modern assessment of her claim that composition is not teachable may help us understand what she really meant. One should contemplate the dialectic of Boulanger's insistence on not teaching composition and the enormous success many of her students achieved as composers. It is certain that she was not attempting to teach her students how to be creative or unique; she simply gave her students the technique and knowledge that allowed their creativity to flourish.

Konstantina Dogani makes suggestions on how to help nurture creativity and individuality in K-12 classrooms. She points out that teachers should not impose a "self-evident formula upon the children," but rather pose "questions which will encourage them to find their own answers and take their own individual paths."⁷ This philosophy and technique should be explored among college composition students. The author continues with this approach: "Then children can be confident to become immersed in the experience of composing as well as improvising."⁸ This is one of many potential methodological solutions to help students develop a unique voice.⁹

The author of the 2006 book *Creative Music Composition*, Margaret Lucy Wilkins, writes that there "are three ingredients that are vital to the development of composers: stimulus to the imagination, technical skill, and knowledge of the musical context in which they wish to work."¹⁰ The first "ingredient" she mentions is important; the thought that stimulus to the imagination can provide students with the framework to explore their creativity is indicative of

⁶ E. Douglas Bomberger, "Rheinberger, Boulanger, and the Art of Teaching Composition," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 12 (1998): 54.

⁷ Konstantina Dogani, "Teachers' Understanding of Composing in the Primary Classroom," *Music Education Research* 6, no. 3 (2004): 276.

⁸ Dogani, "Teachers' Understanding of Composing," 276

⁹ *Ibid.*, 276-277.

¹⁰ Margaret Lucy Wilkins, *Creative Music Composition* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 2.

the modern views on creativity. Dogani's method of helping students develop creative abilities is one way to fulfill Wilkins' requirement of stimulating imagination. Perhaps Dogani's and Wilkins' methods are not dissimilar from Boulanger's; it may be an issue of how the methods are presented. Dogani and Wilkins are not claiming that students can be taught how to be creative, but they are claiming that there are ways to support and facilitate creativity so that it may manifest in students.

If it is true that creativity, the development of a unique voice, and composition are unteachable, then what can composition teachers do? Both Boulanger and Schoenberg believed that creativity is inborn, this is likely what led them to technique driven pedagogy. In a syllabus laid out by Schoenberg, the objectives were "ear-training, development of a sense of form, and understanding of the technique and logic of musical construction."¹¹ However, Schoenberg believed these objectives to be useless unless achieved by a creative mind.¹² Regardless of one's take on whether or not composition and creativity can truly be taught, a good teacher "can provide a stimulating environment in which creativity will flourish."¹³ The question then must be: what does this environment look like?

Technique

For undergraduate composition students, mastery of compositional techniques should be a major part of their studies; however, four out of the six composers interviewed for Mateos-Moreno's study believe that the study of technique treatises or theory books are "useless" or

¹¹ Arnold Schoenberg, *Models for Beginners in Composition* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 1942), quoted in Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition Today?" 410-411

¹² Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition Today?" 411; Barrett Johnson, *Training the Composer* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2010), 150-151. Ebook Accessed August 5, 2014 via Central Michigan University Library, library.cmich.edu.

¹³ Margaret Lucy Wilkins, *Creative Music Composition* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 1.

“entirely dispensable.”¹⁴ Paradoxically, they also believed that there are some universal principles that are important for students to understand.¹⁵

According to Mateos-Moreno, Hindemith’s treatise on composition, “*Craft of Musical Composition*, presupposed a practice obedient to a number of rules.”¹⁶ If one were to glance at the table of contents in the first volume of Hindemith’s treatise, the assumption would be that this is a theory textbook and not an instructional guide on the art of composition. Hindemith actually titles the first volume of his treatise the “theoretical part.” He points out that “no matter how ingenious a theory is, it means nothing ... until the evidence is placed ... in actual sound.”¹⁷ Here, he is pointing out that theory and technique is, for the act of composing, pointless without putting it to use as a tool of expression. The topics covered in *The Art of Strict Musical Composition* by Johann Philipp Kirnberger are quite similar to those in Hindemith’s later treatise.¹⁸ They both deal with modes and scales, harmony, cadence, melody, etc., and yet, Kirnberger wrote his texts in the late 18th century and Hindemith wrote his in the early 20th century. This suggests that there may be some universalities in the realm of compositional technique.

Like Hindemith, Schoenberg believed in the prerequisite mastery of traditional compositional techniques.¹⁹ This fact is curious when considering Schoenberg’s own revolutionary innovations and that one of his most famous students is the avant-gardist John Cage. This in itself is not sufficient evidence that Schoenberg’s technique-based pedagogy is

¹⁴ Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition Today?" 419.

¹⁵ Ibid., 418.

¹⁶ Ibid., 410.

¹⁷ Paul Hindemith, *Theoretical Part*, 4th ed., vol. 1, *The Craft of Musical Composition* (New York, NY: Associated Music Publishers, 1937), 156.

¹⁸ Johann Philipp Kirnberger, *The Art of Strict Musical Composition*, ed. Claude V. Palisca, trans. David Beach and Jurgen Thym (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁹ Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition Today?" 411.

effective, but it is cause for further study. David Ward-Steinman poses important questions about technique and creativity:

Can composition really be taught? Is craft something separate from the art of composing? Are counterpoint and theory the tools of craft? These tools can indeed be taught, but they are only kindling material—the flame must come from within the student. But of what value are they for contemporary composers, other than as an insight into historical styles and methods, and for a greater appreciation for the masters of those styles?²⁰

Kaschub and Smith espouse an approach to technique that is more lenient than Schoenberg's or Hindemith's. They assert that preoccupying oneself with technique “reduces autonomy and, eventually, student motivation.”²¹ Later, the authors admit that it is a combination of intuition and technique that will guide students into creating successful and expressive works.²² The authors described portfolios for high school composition students: “Encourage students to develop a variety of pieces but also to compose several pieces within the same style or genre to master specific techniques.”²³ Kaschub and Smith's book *Minds on Music* can assist in the development of a music curriculum for K-12 students that incorporates composition, and many of the principles addressed in this book are applicable to college composition students.

Judith Shatin suggests that specific techniques may not need to be compulsory. She addresses how composition pedagogy is beginning to move away from not only fixed goals, as Boulanger would have had it, but also from one-on-one instruction. It may be that this move away from fixed goals, such as the mastery of counterpoint, form, etc., means that there are in fact no universals for what a composition student must know to be successful as an artist.²⁴

²⁰ David Ward-Steinman, "On Composing: Doing It, Teaching It, Living It," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 9, Accessed August 5, 2014, doi:10.1353/pme.2011.0007. RILM Abstracts of Music Literature.

²¹ Michele Kaschub and Janice Smith, *Minds on Music* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009), 19

²² *Ibid.*, 20, 19-21.

²³ *Ibid.*, 250.

²⁴ Judith Shatin, "The Ins and Outs of Teaching Composition," *College Music Symposium* 49/50 (2009/2010): 189, Accessed August 5, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41225245>. RILM Abstracts of Music Literature.

“The perfect combination is a brilliant concept together with a polished technique.”²⁵ As suggested by Schoenberg and Boulanger’s belief about creativity, and supported by Wilkins, one must have a powerful imagination and technical skills to bring ideas to fruition. If Schoenberg had been an amateur with big ideas about a musical system in which all notes held equal weight but lacked the technique or knowledge about how to develop such a system, we would be without 12-tone compositions as we know them today. As revolutionary as serialism was, Schoenberg may have not been able to imagine serialism without his master of more standard compositional techniques.

Musical techniques of any kind will always be tied to cultural factors. As cultures change, so too does music, and so must musical techniques. Pedagogues and scholars must keep this fact in mind before moving forward with codification of teaching practices. At this time, we may become preoccupied with counterpoint, tonal harmony, serialism, minimalism, etc., but as time stubbornly presses on, academics must be careful to not allow too much importance to be given to bygone techniques. One could argue that scholars are meant to partake in the literal definition philosophy²⁶ by acquiring wisdom and knowledge through the study of all things. We should also remember something Alain Badiou said about the absence of philosophy: The absence of philosophy results in “the repetition of what is dominant in the common society.”²⁷

If it is true that mastery of technique is vital to the success of a composer, as the older generation of composition pedagogues like Hindemith, Schoenberg, and Boulanger so strongly

²⁵ Margaret Lucy Wilkins, *Creative Music Composition* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 103.

²⁶ Philosophy: “*love of knowledge, pursuit thereof, speculation.*” From A Greek-English Lexicon, accessed 1/8/2016, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=filosofi/a>

²⁷ “Alain Badiou on the education of the philosophers with Giovanni Tusa,” video file, YouTube, posted September 1, 2015, Accessed January 8, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6b0BiXs1vwu>

believed and the newer generation suggests with some trepidation, then the real challenge will be developing a unique voice within the context of certain rules.

Universal Techniques

There are hundreds of books on composition techniques. Some contain several techniques (e.g., those by Hindemith, Schoenberg, and Kirnberger); others are devoted to one. It would be out of the realm of this review to study each of these texts. It would be helpful for future researchers on this topic to do a thorough review of compositional technique and theory textbooks to find the most helpful and effective extant teaching sources.

The following techniques are what could be considered universal techniques. These techniques are the ones that are found frequently in the literature on composition pedagogy or are claimed to be essential by composers and educators or both.

Ear Training and Score Analysis

Ear training, aural perception, aural comprehension, and various other titles are given to the compulsory aural skills courses taught in music programs throughout the world. But does the ability to utilize one's sonic imagination²⁸ hold particular importance for composers? Score analysis was regarded by Boulanger as a necessary skill and is only possible for individuals with sufficiently trained ears.

Boulanger would have her students reduce scores and play them at the piano, and she would not accept a mediocre performance.²⁹ Each part had to sound independently musical. Why

²⁸ "Sonic Imagination" is a term I first heard used by Paul Rudy at the UMKC Composition Workshop in June, 2014.

²⁹ Ward-Steinman, "On Composing," 12.

do this? Why put your composition students through the rigors of piano playing and score reading? It is clear that not only did Boulanger want to teach her students discipline, but she was also helping them understand the intricacies of masterworks. According to E. Douglas Bomberger, both Josef Rheinberger, a late 19th century composition teacher, and Boulanger were experts in *audiation*.³⁰ They could thumb through a score and hear every note, or at the very least convince their students that they were hearing every note.³¹ Utilizing this skill, modeling it for their students, and having their students work intimately with scores was surely not an aimless exercise. Modern composition pedagogues believe a strong inner ear is an important skill to develop; based on Mateos-Moreno's interviews, ear training and score analysis are among the most important things for composition students.³² David Cope writes that score-analysis can aid in developing and understanding of form and orchestration: "Listening to music with scores also can help composers hear and better understand musical form and structure" and score study can illustrate "how individual instruments sound in various registers and how various ensembles of instruments sound together."³³

Rheinberger and Boulanger would "encourage their students to compose away from the keyboard" to develop audiation skills.³⁴ To be able to easily take rhythms, harmonies, and melodies from your mind and organize them effortlessly on paper is a crucial skill to have and will allow you to explore more ideas at a quicker rate. Parry-Jamieson points out that some more advanced composers use audiation as composition tool: ". . . [some] sophisticated composers rely

³⁰ From the Gordon Institute of Music Learning: "Audiation is the foundation of musicianship. It takes place when we hear and comprehend music for which the sound is no longer or may never have been present. One may audiate when listening to music, performing from notation, playing "by ear," improvising, composing, or notating music." Accessed on January 6, 2016, <http://giml.org/mlt/audiation/>

³¹ Bomberger, "Rheinberger, Boulanger, and the Art of Teaching Composition," 56-57.

³² Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition Today?" 419.

³³ David Cope, *Techniques of the Contemporary Composer* (New York, NY: Schirmer Books, 1997), 8.

³⁴ Bomberger, "Rheinberger, Boulanger, and the Art of Teaching Composition," 57.

on highly-developed inner hearing and function almost completely in abstract representations of musical sounds.”³⁵

Counterpoint

David Ward-Steinman had the good fortune to study with both Nadia Boulanger and Darius Milhaud. Ward-Steinman noted that students of Boulanger’s would often be doing “seemingly endless *solfège*, counterpoint, or other technical studies...”³⁶ Counterpoint was vital to Milhaud as a composer. Ward-Steinman writes:

[Milhaud] relied on harmony (especially poly-harmony and poly-tonality) as well as counterpoint to express himself. He once told me that there were only two kinds of pieces he would never write: (1) a monophonic piece for a solo wind or brass instrument (no possibility of harmony or counterpoint) ...³⁷

Counterpoint is addressed in several important texts on composition. Including Johann Philipp Kirnberger’s *The Art of Strict Musical Composition* (Kirnberger was a student of J. S. Bach), Paul Hindemith’s *The Craft of Musical Composition*, Arnold Schoenberg’s *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*,³⁸ and David Cope’s *Techniques of the Contemporary Composer*. It is clear that counterpoint has been viewed as an important compositional technique over the centuries.

Benjamin John Williams asserts in his dissertation that “*Clarity* can be discerned through an examination of the ‘rules’ of counterpoint.”³⁹ Elliott Carter, considered to be one of the finest

³⁵ Megan Cyrisse Parry-Jamieson, "From Play to Potential: Composition Pedagogy in Music Education" (doctoral thesis, The University of Western Ontario, 2005), 284. Accessed August 5, 2014. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text.

³⁶ Ward-Steinman, "On Composing," 6.

³⁷ Ibid., 8.

³⁸ Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1967).

³⁹ Williams, "Music Composition Pedagogy," 108.

avant-garde composers of the 20th century, saw the value in counterpoint—even if he believed it to be old-fashioned:

Boulanger taught me, maybe more than anything else, about how concern for small details in music can make a great deal of difference in the total effect. It came out, obviously, in the study of counterpoint. We did counterpoint in up to eight parts with her . . . She made us aware of this extraordinary control of detail, particularly in counterpoint, and as a result, my concern for counterpoint has lasted throughout my work. . . . So many recent composers . . . are not aware of how counterpoint can give a depth of focus or a musical ambience to their ideas. . . . This is a very old-fashioned point of view, I'm beginning to feel, but it was something very valuable to me.⁴⁰

Unlike Carter, who believed counterpoint to be valuable even if it was old fashioned, Berlioz was downright malevolent towards it: “Berlioz found it difficult to win the Prix de Rome due to his distaste for writing counterpoint . . . Berlioz often expressed his animosity towards fugal writing...”⁴¹

Ward-Steinman writes: “Instrumentalists practice scales and etudes to maintain their technique; for composers counterpoint can serve a similar purpose...”⁴² In the same year that David Ward-Steinman wrote these words, 2011, the six working composition pedagogues interviewed by Daniel Mateos-Moreno make little mention of counterpoint and harmony. Judith Weir said only that they may be useful tools but the study of such things should not be

⁴⁰ Jonathan W. Bernard, "An Interview with Elliott Carter," *Perspectives of New Music* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 199-200, quoted in Ward-Steinman, "On Composing," 13.

⁴¹ Williams, "Music Composition Pedagogy" 53.

⁴² Ward-Steinman, "On Composing" 10.

compulsory, while Michael Finnisy and Robert Saxton believe in at least basic training in counterpoint.⁴³

Form

Form is an important aspect for artists of all media to understand. This is especially true for music composition since the grand medium of time itself is a daunting one to manage. Vera Stanojevic addresses this problem in her 2004 dissertation. There is sometimes the issue of being able to generate musical ideas at all, but Stanojevic suspects that most people voluntarily studying composition already have had musical ideas but are not sure what exactly to do with these ideas. She writes: “The students most often kept these ideas to themselves, not so much out of shyness, but because they felt the ideas lacked form or further development.”⁴⁴ With knowledge of form, composers can give life to their musical ideas.

In their 2012 study, Wiggins and Espeland address ways in which their 12 year-old students were prompted to compose a blues song. The authors take the reader through the students’ process. It is the students’ understanding of a 12-bar blues form that allows them to conceive ideas rather easily within this framework. However, “as the learners invented and developed their own ideas, they moved further and further from the model...”⁴⁵ The same sort of exercises would benefit college-level composers, especially freshmen and sophomores struggling to generate finished pieces. But rather than writing a simple 12-bar blues song, perhaps college students would be asked to write an invention, a piece in sonata-allegro form, a rondo, etc. David

⁴³ Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition Today?" 420.

⁴⁴ Vera D. Stanojevic, "An Approach to the Pedagogy of Beginning Music Composition" (DMA diss., The Ohio State University, 2004), 19. Accessed August 5, 2014. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text.

⁴⁵ Jackie Wiggins and Magne I. Espeland, "Creating in Music Learning Contexts," *The Oxford Handbook of Music Education* 1 (November 2012): 10, Accessed August 5, 2014, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199730810.013.0021. RILM Abstracts of Music Literature.

Cope also asserts that using extant forms and common practice period styles as organizing tools for beginning composers is useful in developing essential techniques.⁴⁶ Part II of Schoenberg's *Fundamentals of Music Composition* offers instruction on ternary, minuet, scherzo, theme and variation, rondo, and sonata-allegro forms.

Self-Criticism and Assessment

Self-Criticism is taught by Boulanger and Milhaud as perhaps the most important thing a composer can practice. Ward-Steinman sums up this thinking with a quote from Goethe: "What did the author [composer] set out to do? Was his plan reasonable and sensible, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?"⁴⁷ Schoenberg was also a proponent of thorough self-criticism. He offers a precise step-by-step list on how to critique one's own work in his *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*.⁴⁸

Parry-Jamieson points out that instructors face problems when assessing the quality of creative work. Based on her research, she cannot give her readers statements regarding "(1) what makes compositions creative, or (2) how a student's identification of music as creative helps his own creative process."⁴⁹ This is in reference to K-12 education, but the same problem may exist within college level institutions. If a rubric could be created to guide the creation of student compositions and the assessment of them for both teacher and student, would it be detrimental or helpful to a student's creative development?

⁴⁶ Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947) cited in Cope, *Techniques of the Contemporary*, 11.

⁴⁷ Ward-Steinman, "On Composing," 16.

⁴⁸ Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, 116, cited in Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition today?" 411.

⁴⁹ Parry-Jamieson, "From Play to Potential," 45.

Rather than judging individual pieces, portfolios may be a way for students and teachers to assess a student's progress over time. Parry-Jamieson gives a description of what this might entail:

Final assessment and evaluation of students' works is a difficult issue. Since compositional development is unique to each person, it is not appropriate to set a grade standard for all students. Rather, assessing progress via the portfolio is the most fair option. The end-of-term portfolio should contain examples of work which students consider their best ... Also, Tracking Musical Elements sheets, Common Notational Error sheets ... This allows the teacher to reflect back on each student's progress, and focus on the elements and processes that have been explored throughout the term. Grades can then be assigned on the basis of on-going effort, attention to feedback, and self-awareness of process as evidenced in the self-evaluations. While this aspect of their grade will be largely subjective, smaller mini-lesson exercises can be graded more objectively ...⁵⁰

Variation

Variation is an important technique to grasp for, arguably, any style of music. Stanojevic prepares students for the composition of phrases, but what is the next step?⁵¹ The next step could be many things depending on the taste of the composer. For a composition instructor, either in the classroom or in one-on-one instruction, it is necessary to provide their student with the various modes of variation in conjunction with other options to further a musical thought or phrase, such as exact repetition to impart a sense of familiarity with that phrase. Refer Stanojevic's DMA dissertation for practical examples and exercises on variation.⁵²

Orchestration

The skill of orchestration is a necessary one for any composer who plans on writing pieces that include two or more instruments. There are classes on orchestration and the

⁵⁰ Parry-Jamieson, "From Play to Potential," 302.

⁵¹ Stanojevic, "An Approach to the Pedagogy," 20-27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 29-46, 40-41.

prevalence of orchestration courses can be seen “following the nineteenth-century publication of such texts as Berlioz’s *Grand Traité d’Instrumentation et d’Orchestration Modernes* from 1843–4.”⁵³ Stanojevic points out that “Since the beginning of the 20th century, composers have increasingly employed timbre as a resource for compositional expression.”⁵⁴

Secondary Skills and Knowledge

There are some secondary skills and knowledge that composers should have. They are referred to here as secondary not because they lack importance, but because these are auxiliary to the actual craft of composition.

Notation

The practice of notating with precision and neatness was something stressed by both Boulanger and Rheinberger. Even in exercises meant solely for academics, Rheinberger had his students practice impeccable penmanship when putting pen to paper.⁵⁵ This concern is not as important any more with the advent of notation software.

As the times change and home recording studios become increasingly prevalent, it is becoming easier for large numbers of musicians to preserve the music they write. In centuries past, musicians who were illiterate in graphic notation passed down music through oral tradition. Today’s relatively accessible technological resources have led to a sort of emancipation of people’s creative minds. Even professional composers now use recording technology as a tool for speedy preservation of ideas. It remains just as important, however, for professional

⁵³ Williams, "Music Composition Pedagogy" 64.

⁵⁴ Stanojevic, "An Approach to the Pedagogy," 13.

⁵⁵ Bomberger, "Rheinberger, Boulanger, and the Art of Teaching Composition" 61.

composers to be able to accurately graphically notate their music to transmit intent to performers.⁵⁶ Coming up with excellent musical ideas is one step in the creative process, but being able to look at what you have created in an illustrated manner will allow the composer to more objectively analyze, organize, and develop what they have created.

As music has seen drastic changes over the past century, so too has notation in order to keep up with these changes. Modern composers must be familiar with the new notational possibilities. David Cope does an excellent job of providing examples of various modern graphic notation in *Techniques of the Contemporary Composer*.⁵⁷ There is a chapter titled “Indeterminacy” which provides notational examples for indeterminate works. One interesting example given is the piece *Square* that is notated with nothing more than a circle.⁵⁸

Planning

In chapter three of Wilkins’s *Creative Music Composition* she makes a compelling analogy between the form and structure of musical compositions and the art of architecture.⁵⁹ Part of constructing a physical structure is planning, perhaps in the form of creating a blueprint. It would not be wise of an architect to simply start “piling one stone on top of another and waiting to see how the building would turn out.”⁶⁰ While composers can safely do such a thing with sound, it may not be the best use of their time. Once a composer has a musical or extra-musical concept, a sort of blueprint can be created to guide the creation of the piece in an ordered manner. One example Wilkins gives of pre-composition planning are the graphics created by

⁵⁶ Kaschub and Smith, *Minds on Music*, 108-109.

⁵⁷ Cope, *New Music Composition*, 150.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵⁹ Wilkins, *Creative Music Composition*, 23.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

Kaija Saariaho for her piece *Verblendungen*.⁶¹ Ward-Steinman also points out that architecture and music have had a long relationship, from the well-known examples of Notre Dame to Xenakis's Philips Pavilion. The author refers to his own teaching of deep structure in music and using other art-forms as analogous examples.⁶²

Kaschub and Smith refer to planning directly "as a pre-compositional activity in which a composer or composers conceive of a piece in its entirety before working out its constituent parts."⁶³ Creating maps, outlines, or plans and schemes to guide a composition is an important skill to have at one's disposal when trying to create a new piece. This skill is most applicable for more advanced composition students, but could certainly be taught at any time in their education. It is an especially important skill to have for composers who receive commissions somewhat regularly. Composers cannot wait for a moment of intense inspiration to come to them when working on a deadline. As a professional composer, one must be able to create when called to do so. To quote David Ward-Steinman: "According to Lou Harrison, Virgil Thomson had a routine of his own for avoiding writer's block. 'It is important, he said, to keep regular appointments with the muse—if she doesn't arrive then it's not your fault, at least you are there!'"⁶⁴

Discipline

Virgil Thomson's sentiment brings up the issue of discipline. If someone wishes to call himself or herself a composer, then the title should be taken seriously. Stravinsky likened the regularity in which he wrote music to the hours of a banker.⁶⁵ If someone claims to be a banker,

⁶¹ Wilkins, *Creative Music Composition*, 38-39.

⁶² Ward-Steinman, "On Composing" 19.

⁶³ Kaschub and Smith, *Minds on Music*, 37.

⁶⁴ Lou Harrison, *Lou Harrison's Music Primer*, Japanese/English ed. (New York, NY: C.F. Peters, 1971; 1993), cited in Ward-Steinman, "On Composing" 13.

⁶⁵ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 107, quoted in Ward-Steinman, "On Composing" 13.

then they would be expected to be at the bank from 9am to 5pm. Bomberger also mentions discipline as being an essential part of Boulanger and Rheinberger's pedagogy. Boulanger and Rheinberger believed that one must work hard to master traditional⁶⁶ compositional techniques before developing a unique voice.⁶⁷ Taking all of these facets of discipline into account, the student composer should be expected to be studying and writing counterpoint, mastering extant forms, score reading, etc., every day—because it is their job.

Technology

In order to stay competitive in the job market and relevant as an artist, a composer must be aware of constantly changing technology. The 19th century saw the invention of some now ubiquitous instruments such as the saxophone and tuba. The changes made in music technology in the 19th century pale in comparison to changes made in the last 30 years alone. A composer cannot possibly hope to remain on the cutting edge if they are unaware of the new sounds that can be made and the various ways in which they can be created. This also means the modern composer must be computer literate. Kaschub and Smith point out that compositional tools are divided into two groups: "sound makers and sound preservers."⁶⁸ Sound makers can now be anything from flute to a saw-tooth wave produced in computer software and sound preservers can now be anything from tape-recorder to looper pedal.

⁶⁶ What is traditional, of course, changes over time as the traditional becomes the ancient. At the time of this paper's creation, the 2010's, most music written before the time of Ravel is considered traditional.

⁶⁷ Bomberger, "Rheinberger, Boulanger, and the Art of Teaching Composition" 60.

⁶⁸ Kaschub and Smith, *Minds on Music*, 50.

Improvisation and Performance

Improvisation is not exclusively a composing technique or tool, but it is becoming increasingly seen as a necessary skill for the modern composer to have. David Ward-Steinman created the Comprehensive Musicianship Program in 1967. In this program, participants are required to be proficient performers, composers, and listeners. All students in this program are to take part in ensembles which developed the students' abilities as an improviser such as jazz bands, world music ensembles, and new music ensembles.⁶⁹ Ward-Steinman writes, "improvisation is an important skill for all musicians, especially composers..."⁷⁰ Furthermore, Parry-Jamieson writes, "Some very sophisticated composers engage in purposeful concrete musical discovery, immersing themselves in improvisation and experiential musical play."⁷¹

In their article geared mostly towards K-12 music educators, Randles and Sullivan address ways in which a teacher can assist students in every aspect of writing a new piece. They talk about ways to help students generate original ideas for starting new pieces.⁷² For example, they cite Wiggins's suggestion of having the teacher improvise several different themes at the piano and have the students use that as fodder to use in any way they choose.⁷³ It could be argued that a better long term solution for students is teaching them the art of improvisation rather than feeding them musical ideas that are not their own.

⁶⁹ Ward-Steinman, "On Composing" 17.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Parry-Jamieson, "From Play to Potential," 284.

⁷² Clint Randles and Mark Sullivan, "How Composers Approach Teaching Composition," *Music Educators Journal* 99, no. 3 (March 2013): Accessed August 5, 2014, doi:10.1177/0027432112471398. RILM Abstracts of Music Literature.

⁷³ Jackie Wiggins, *Composition in the Classroom: A Tool for Teaching* (Reston, VA: MENC, 1990), cited in Clint Randles and Mark Sullivan, "How Composers Approach Teaching Composition," *Music Educators Journal* 99, no. 3 (March 2013): 53, Accessed August 5, 2014, doi:10.1177/0027432112471398. RILM Abstracts of Music Literature.

According to Mateos-Moreno, Boulanger had very high standards for a student's ability to perform at the piano:

She would make her composition students learn and play Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier; they would have to learn individual voices by heart and be able to sing them independently while playing. The aesthetic experience resulting from this practice could potentially be a path to absorbing the hidden qualities of a musical work which go beyond any explicit 'rules'.⁷⁴

In contrast, the six modern composers interviewed by Mateos-Moreno came to a general consensus that performances skills are helpful, but not necessary.⁷⁵

Rhetoric

Talking intelligently and convincingly about your music is a skill composers must have, especially in the early part of their career. Wiggins and Espeland write about the importance of collaborative composing for students. Their writing indicates that the practice of generating ideas and discussing them in collaboration with others teaches you how to communicate about your ideas and helps you feel free to do so, both in the long and short term.⁷⁶

Kaschub and Smith point out the importance of children composers being confident with music vocabulary. College level composition students must also be able to use proper vocabulary among their peers when defending or explaining their work. An understanding of the proper vocabulary will also allow composers to more accurately and confidently translate their strictly musical description of things into language that anyone can understand.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Mateos-Moreno, "Is it Possible to Teach Music Composition Today?" 412.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 420.

⁷⁶ Wiggins and Espeland, "Creating in Music Learning Contexts," 3.

⁷⁷ Kaschub and Smith, *Minds on Music*, 107-108.

In Wilkins's book *Creative Musical Composition*, she provides a list of suggestions that can serve as an outline to writing good program notes.⁷⁸

Event Production and Networking

In an increasingly globalized world, event production is becoming more important. A composer must know how to put on concerts and events that will allow them to be seen and heard by the public and their own musical community. Shatin briefly mentions the importance of young composers having the skills to “curate and mount concerts, as well as organizing colloquia [conferences], and guest artist visits.”⁷⁹ This skill is especially essential for those composition students who will later turn into composition professors. As professors, they may be the sole diplomat for new music at their institution. Brian Eno said that “curatorship, of course, is the big job of the future.”⁸⁰ Being able to create a network of like-minded composers and performers and curate concerts using the disparate styles and tastes of your colleagues is now an art form in itself.

Calls for Further Research

What this review provides is a comprehensive list of skills and knowledge that pedagogues and researchers have determined to be necessary for composition students to learn. It will be most applicable as a starting point for current composition pedagogues and music education researchers. Before addressing the implications of how the discoveries made in this

⁷⁸ Wilkins, *Creative Music Composition*, 261.

⁷⁹ Shatin, "The Ins and Outs of Teaching Composition" 193.

⁸⁰ "In The Ocean - A Film About the Classical Avant Garde," video file, YouTube, posted February 2, 2013, Accessed August 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0NwiTHlhGM>.

review can be put into practice, the problems that demand continued research on this topic must be addressed.

One of the most important findings of this review is the fact that there have been comprehensive texts written on composition pedagogy, but most of them are about K-12 education. For instance, the book *Minds on Music* is on composition pedagogy and describes it in specific settings: early childhood, upper elementary, grades five and six, upper middle school, and high school. Following the guidelines laid out in *Minds on Music* throughout the entirety of K-12 student's development would be immensely helpful to both students and to college and university composition instructors. The reality is that most K-12 students will not receive the in-depth composition education that has been found in this review. But it is clear that many of the principles found in this review that have been geared towards K-12 students are applicable to the development of student composers of any age.

Research regarding K-12 music education may have been decided to be outside the realm of this review since we are concerned with composition pedagogy at the college level, but since there are almost no scholarly studies done in this setting, the K-12 studies had to be considered.

In *Minds on Music*, the authors offer tables that concisely describe the characteristics of varying levels of mastery in composition across age groups.⁸¹ This kind of rubric would be helpful to composition pedagogues at the college level. Once a curriculum committee at a college or university decides upon criteria for composition students, a rubric can be constructed that will in some way guide both students and teacher in instruction.

Further research is required on all of the points made in this review, especially considering the lack of literature on practical composition pedagogy at the college level. What

⁸¹ Kaschub and Smith, *Minds on Music*, 140

needs to be done, specifically, are long term studies in a college setting on the effects of the implementation of curricula utilizing the discoveries made in this review in regards to what undergraduate composition students need to know and be able to do to lead a successful career as a composer. Furthermore, an in-depth survey needs to be created and sent out to composition pedagogues all over the world to better understand the current state of composition pedagogy and what types of approaches are common and successful.

Summary and Conclusions

This review has identified areas of agreement, disagreement, and gaps in the knowledge base. What do composition students at the college level need to know and be able to do to prepare for a life as a professional composer? One of the few things agreed upon as a necessary area of study for composition students is inner-ear training. Many of the professionals researched in this review agree that having an active sonic imagination is helpful and in some cases necessary for writing good music. Being able to use your inner-ear for discovering unique material within one's own mind is important, but a developed inner ear also grants composers the ability to appreciate and study the intricacies of masterworks.

Among the composition pedagogues and music education researchers studied throughout this review, the only thing that is almost unanimously agreed upon, but not necessarily in this language, is that the most important thing for a composer to have is a unique voice. There are indeed disagreements on how to attain a unique voice and some even assert that a unique voice cannot be taught, that creativity is inborn. The question of creativity and a unique voice is not the most divisive question though. The most divisive issue is that of technique and how it fits into the set of tools utilized by composers.

Is it possible to have a precise curriculum that does not inhibit the development of one's unique voice? Those that believe that creativity is inborn, like Boulanger and Schoenberg, ended up teaching a great deal of technique as part of their composition instruction. One can conclude that this approach to composition is due to that belief of inborn creativity. Some of the modern composers and pedagogues reviewed are reluctant to state this as fiercely as Boulanger, but everyone acknowledged that there are certain skills that are necessary to be successful as a composer. Regardless of the level of creativity or individuality one possesses as an artist, mastering proper technique will allow one's creativity to flourish.

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