

21M.260: STRAVINSKY TO THE PRESENT
Paper 2 Prompt

Overall Prompt: Substantiate an argument about two related works that are stylistically distinctive by comparing and contrasting their musical “thesis statements” and by drawing attention to the musical parameters most determinate of the contrast between the musical “theses.”

Amplification: Comparing very different works is easy, but beside the point. The more challenging and illuminating task is to compare two works that have something substantial in common and then differentiate them based in a more subtle and detailed critique: an “oranges to oranges” assignment. This builds on our previous work on the concept of the “musical thesis statement,” in that you will again determine which musical parameters are most important in determining the character of the pieces. The difference is that you will use these two thesis statements *in dialogue* with each other to discuss how the two pieces are distinctive but still comparable.

The answer will be different, of course, depending on which works you decide to write about. But the most important task is to listen a lot, with the scores, until you figure out what is most interesting to you to write about in these two works. That means taking lots of detailed notes, which will form the basis of evidence for your argument about the differences in these two pieces’ artistic purposes.

Neither work may be covered on the syllabus. One piece must have been written between 1945 and 1990 and the other must have been written between 1990 and the present. They may be by the same composer (but that may or may not help you). To come up with fruitful composers and works, you might go back to the Auner to trace particular historical themes or commonalities over the second half of the course. I am also happy to meet with you next week to discuss ideas and options.

By Class 21, you must have the pieces chosen and have done enough listening and preparation to be able to draft an abstract and outline during class, which we will then trade and discuss in peer review.

Paper 2 is an analysis paper and, as such, should cite specific details from the scores by measure or rehearsal number to substantiate your claims. You can also use pasted musical examples if you like, but they are not necessary if you direct me to the correct passage in the scores. In addition, you will want to eventually look up a few well-chosen secondary sources to substantiate big ideas about style and history, along the lines of the Paper 1 revision.¹ This is not, however, primarily a research paper.

To achieve the highest possible grade, your essay will:

- demonstrate a strong understanding of the works’ musical techniques and styles.
- use expert musical terminology correctly to analyze what you hear and see in the scores.
- thoroughly and specifically cite all sources used.
- be double-spaced in a 12-point font with a title and heading, with a length \geq 2500 words.
- be proofread carefully for correct grammar, spelling, and syntax.

¹ You must also cite basic sources such as the Grove Music Online article about the composer, the textbook, and the score and recording you used to do the work. You should cite anything you used – even websites that you Googled to get or the program notes from your recording.

You should turn the paper in by email by 5pm on May 12. Please also either send links to electronic scores or place hard copy (library or printout/photocopy) scores in my mailbox. Late papers will be assessed a penalty unless MIT Student Support Services is involved, preferably in advance.

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