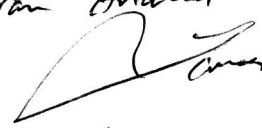


from Andrea


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March 15, 2010

Dear Martin,

I was very grateful for the opportunity to observe (and participate in) your class last Thursday. I enjoyed the class very much and I was very impressed by the highly technical knowledge your students demonstrated. I am including some notes and comments about the class; I hope they will be helpful to you.

Sincerely,

Andrea Schutz
Chair, LTD Committee

Teaching Observation Notes and Comments

Class: FNAR 2043: 'Hot 100' Songwriting/Arranging
Date and Time of Day: Thursday, March 11, 2010; 1pm-2:20
Room: MMH 101
Instructor: Dr. Martin Kutnowski
No. of students in attendance: 11
No. of students enrolled in course: 18

Structure of class: participatory lecture.

Dr. Kutnowski had a clear, well thought out class prepared. The class' task was to examine in technical detail one of Schubert's Lieder ("Auf dem Flusse"). They accomplished this in a series of well designed steps:

1. Reading and working with the song's lyrics
2. Imagining their own musical settings of the text
3. Listening to Schubert's version
4. Analysing Schubert's version
5. Playing with music and text

The structure of this class was clear, organic and very interesting, even for an outside observer like myself.

1. Dr. Kutnowski handed out copies of the song's text (in German and in an English translation) and had audio performances available. He began by going through the text in English and in German, asking about imagery, meanings, and engaging with the song in a purely textual manner. The students were slow to start at first (not too surprising, with a

stranger in the room), but did gradually warm up and provide some pertinent remarks, partly because Dr. Kutnowski divided them into small, ad hoc groups (2-3 students per group). Most groups volunteered to share their insights, and the conversation picked up. It should be noted that the students were actually working in their groups – I could overhear several very good conversations about lyrics and imagery. They were increasingly attuned to connections between structure, words and dynamics of the emotions, as became particularly clear in the next segment.

2. The students were then asked to spend a few minutes thinking about the lyrics and working out how they would set them to music. Schubert's version had not been played yet. The students then reported on their ideas for the song setting. This was the most impressive part of the class, to me. The students displayed a remarkable sense of song structure, technical knowledge and innovation. They noted changes of mood and sensibility in the lyrics and devised intelligent ways of representing these musically. For instance, one person said that the song should begin "in a major key, but not on the tonic". All suggestions were then played by Dr. Kutnowski, and the students responded in agreement or further clarification. This was a brilliant part of the class: I was tremendously impressed with the students' level of engagement and their technical knowledge. I really enjoyed the ideas they came up with, because it was clear that they knew what they wanted, understood the song text, and knew how to express not only obvious ideas like 'major keys for happy bits, minor keys for sad;' they were actually being clever about their ideas, playing with expectations and not doing the obvious at all. They had also clearly developed favourites amongst the previous songs studied, because Dr. Kutnowski often made reference to other works, which the students knew and approved. After the class, I asked this student if he had done a lot of music theory, and he said he'd done a bit, but that most of his formal training had come from a 3ch course with Dr. Kutnowski the previous term; he also volunteered that most of the people in the class, though all musically inclined, had really only had either this course, or the previous one.
3. The class next listened to Schubert's setting of the text. Primed as they were by their own ideas for the setting, they listened very intelligently. Discussion then focussed on what Schubert had done that they expected and where he had surprised them. We listened to Schubert's Lied a few times, each time with greater understanding.
4. Dr. Kutnowski then provided us with the score for the song, and we listened and read the music. He took us through the dynamics of the piece, the changes and innovations in Schubert's score, and matched the music to the words. We observed how Schubert read the poem he set to music, and discussed further the way Schubert chose to express his reading musically.
5. The final segment of the class was a fun and unorthodox way to determine how much a song's meaning is constructed out of the conjunction between words and music. The students were asked to change certain verbs or nouns, keeping everything else the same, but thereby changing the topic of the song completely (I think one major change turned the song into a complaint about a bad dog). This was very funny and an excellent way to end the class. The students got up and sang their new versions, to Dr. Kutnowski's accompaniment. The point remained clear: the song's force is a function of the appropriate conjunction between music and text. Changing the lyrics risks making the music bombastic and overblown. Students also learned about the difficulties of

translation, since the metre in English doesn't quite work with the rhythms of the music intended for German words.

Dynamics of the class: very good.

Students were engaged and interested, proud of their knowledge and quite happy to share. It helps that it is such a small class; the room is rather too large for them, but that can't be helped. Dr. Kutnowski clearly connects well with his students: he trusts them to be able to do what he asks, and they trust him with their answers and insights (and their voices!). I don't doubt that my presence threw the dynamics off, but it is a testament to all of them that they forgot about me after a bit. They volunteered often and well. I particularly liked Dr. Kutnowski asking them to be impulsive. I think this quality is important in student learning, because too often students are afraid to be anything but right. Yet spontaneity and experimentation are among the ways we learn, and I was very impressed with the amount this class had already learned and were still learning. Having to commit themselves to a musical reading of the text before hearing the 'official' version made them better able to engage with Schubert's 'reading.' As a result, their appreciation of Schubert's musical choices and decisions was informed and intelligent.

Intellectual work/level: very high

As previously noted, the students' technical knowledge was impressive. More impressive still was not that they knew their technical terms, but that they could manipulate and implement their technical knowledge. When they suggested musical approaches analogous to other works they had already encountered, they demonstrated a sense of periodicity and genre: no one suggested baroque embellishments or modern minimalism as a setting for what was clearly a Romantic poem.

Place of this class in course's broader pedagogy: appropriate and helpful.

This class was not only informative in itself, it was also preparation and example for an upcoming assignment. Walking the students through the process of analysis as well as then looking at a score in very close detail prepared them very well for their assignment on such analysis. Dr. Kutnowski admirably modelled the process, desired outcomes, and learning the next assignment is intended to test. Moreover, the students (and I) walked away from the class with a much more sophisticated sense of song structure and innovation.

What did I learn: A great deal!

As someone who teaches poetry (or struggles with teaching it), I was very impressed that the students not only grasped the central images of the 'poem' but were articulating very apt connections between the text's structure and its words. This is something I often find difficult to achieve when I'm teaching poetry, and I have become persuaded that I should approach poetry through song and its structures, because Dr. Kutnowski's method clearly worked. If I am ever teaching a first year survey in English again, I would be very pleased to have Dr. Kutnowski's help: song is where most students encounter poetry today, and it's something they know about without realising how much they know. It would be a lot of fun to invite Dr. Kutnowski to my classroom and collaborate on teaching students to respond to poetry in such a manner. Likewise, I would be delighted to collaborate with him in this course, if he were so inclined and if he teaches it again. Since Dr. Kutnowski's expertise is in music, and mine is in text (and several of music's favourite languages), I could imagine very exciting classes: I can help the students to

respond even more to the words, while Dr. Kutnowski teaches me more about them still by making me hear them.

In short, I thought Dr. Kutnowski taught an excellent class, is doing an excellent job in this course, and connects well with his students. The change in activities kept the students engaged, while each activity lead seamlessly from the previous. The class was very well-organised, but never felt over-prepared. It seemed organic, spontaneous and encouraged precisely the impulsivity Dr. Kutnowski required of his students.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Andrea Schutz".

Andrea Schutz