

COUNTERCLASSICAL TREATISE

By Kebra-Seyoun Charles

Youth Orchestra Performance Module

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

EarShot Publishing administers the publishing rights of select orchestral works read, performed, and/or commissioned through American Composers Orchestra's national EarShot composer advancement initiatives, which include Readings, CoLABoratory Fellowships, and other commissioning opportunities. In 2023–24, eight composers have been selected to publish works for professional orchestra; four of these pieces will be arranged for youth orchestra. All of the composers have worked with the American Composers Orchestra Education staff to create teaching modules/lesson plans that can be implemented during residences and site visits with orchestras' community partners or schools. EarShot Publishing is facilitated in part by Boosey & Hawkes, ACO's sole licensing agent, and with the support of the Sphinx Venture Fund.

The following educational module includes classroom integrated activities which will facilitate learning of the composer's work while helping students to:

- Deepen their understanding of music composition.
- Personalize their relationship with living composers and their work.
- Playfully engage with the composers' methods and materials.
- Learn approaches to building connections between themselves and the works they perform.
- Increase confidence around new techniques, genres and sound worlds.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The module is organized in 7 segments and includes a robust resource page to allow for further study and preparation OR to facilitate arts integration. There are 5 segments which are each focused on a single learning inquiry and 2 which actively prepare the students for performing the work.

The inquiries include:

- What is a CONTEMPORARY COMPOSER?
- WHO is the COMPOSER?
- What is the IDEA behind the work?
- How did the COMPOSER turn the IDEA into SOUND?
- How did the COMPOSER turn those SOUNDS into MUSIC?

Each segment contains brief notes from the composer that give insight into the experiences, inspirations, and processes that led to the writing of this piece along with EASY TO USE PROMPTS to help engage your students with the topics and the music. Most of the segments can be completed in about 20 minutes - some more quickly, allowing the teacher to organize as they see fit.

THE COMPOSER

TREATISE is KEBRA-SEYOUN CHARLES

of COUNTERCLASSICAL

My name is Kebra:

I'm a solo bassist and composer in New York! I grew up the child of an African drummer and dancer in Miami - I didn't know it at the time but going to her rehearsals influenced the way that I think, and perform, classical music today.



"I went to high school in downtown Miami at a school called New World School of the Arts, it's where I learned how to play jazz and also where I learned the skills I need everyday to be a collaborative musician."



Kebra playing
Andres Martin's Bass
Concerto



Kebra playing and leading
their piece "Dating in NY"

THE COMPOSER

of COUNTERCLASSICAL

TREATISE is KEBRA-SEYOUN CHARLES



Ornamenting the self:

What is an *ornament* and where might you find one?

Notice the ways that Kebra ornaments themselves - can you think of any way that a person might ornament themselves?

DISCUSSION



What are the ways that you choose to ornament yourself?

Are there ways that people from other countries or cultures ornament themselves differently?

THE COMPOSER of COUNTERCLASSICAL TREATISE is KEBRA-SEYOUN CHARLES

Keбра has been inspired by a lot of different types of music throughout their life. Here are three very different pieces of music that Keбра enjoys:



How are these songs different? How are they similar?

DISCUSSION



What are some of the songs or sounds from your childhood?

If you made music, how do you think those songs would influence the music you write?

THE IDEA

behind the composition of COUNTERCLASSICAL TREATISE

Bringing different music types together:

Even though this piece is written in a **western classical style**, it mixes in elements drawn from other musical styles and traditions.

Kebra especially wanted to include the use of **improvisation** – by allowing the musicians to add ornaments and “riffing”, Kebra felt the music would be more emotional and lively.



What are three types of music you like?



Check out a playlist from Kebra that inspired *Counterclassical Treatise*

THE IDEA

behind the composition of
COUNTERCLASSICAL TREATISE

Turning Western Classical Music on its Head:

This piece combines multiple musical styles in one piece, creating a new language of its own unique to Kebra's vision. Kebra calls it *counter-classicism*.



What does counter mean?
What might counterclassical mean?

DISCUSSION



Do you listen to playlists?

What kind of music is on YOUR playlists?

Do you listen to music that all sounds the same? Or do you like listening to music of different styles?

Does any of the music you listen to include improvisation?

Think of Kebra's Counterclassical Treatise like a playlist - as the piece progresses the style fluidly changes!

How the **COMPOSER** turned the **THE** **IDEA** into **SOUND**

In Kebra's words:

"Performers and composers use ornamentation to make an otherwise simple passage of music more complex. Ornamentation should be an expression of the performer's own inner **musical intuition**"

As performers, we use our own **musical intuition** to add personal flair and passion into a straight-forward passage of music. We call this **ornamentation**.



What is intuition and how can we use it in the music we play?

How the **COMPOSER** turned the **THE** **IDEA** into **SOUND**

Improvisation through Ornamentation:

When ornamenting a passage, musicians intuitively embellish what is visually on the page to make it sound and feel more like themselves.

In other styles of music like gospel and pop, singers will use ornamentation, more casually known as 'riffing' to show off skill, have fun, and bring more passion to a piece of music.

In *Counterclassical Treatise* we are given chances to ornament and 'riff' on our instruments just like a pop or gospel singer would.

DISCUSSION



Do you think this could be done on an INSTRUMENT?

How could you achieve a riff on YOUR instrument?

THERE ARE TWO **TYPES** OF ORNAMENTATION

- 1) **Classical Ornamentation** – which takes inspiration from practices in western classical music.
- 2) **“Counterclassical” Ornamentation** – which is inspired by musical practices in genres outside of classical music, like pop, rock, jazz, hip hop and any other type of music you can think of!

CLASSICAL ORNAMENTATION



TRILLS

One of the most widely performed ornaments, a trill can be performed above or below the starting note.



CLASSICAL ORNAMENTATION

NEIGHBOR

Uses the surrounding notes– either diatonic or chromatic - to embellish the starting note.



CLASSICAL ORNAMENTATION



INTERVALLIC

Uses a note in an interval away from the starting note either in upwards or downwards motion.

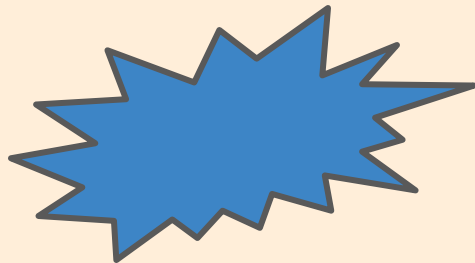


ACTIVITY



**See if YOU can try
an ornamentation!**

ACTIVITY cont.



1. Practice intuitively **ornamenting** to something easy.
2. Have the conductor give an extremely slow beat
3. Play a simple scale that you play in your warm ups. As you move up between the pitches, challenge yourself to add one or two ornamentations throughout the scale
4. Try playing a scale a second time, and try to see if you can add ornaments for every single new note!



What made this activity challenging?
What made it fun?

How the **COMPOSER** turned the **THE** **SOUND** into **MUSIC**

Creating structure for play:

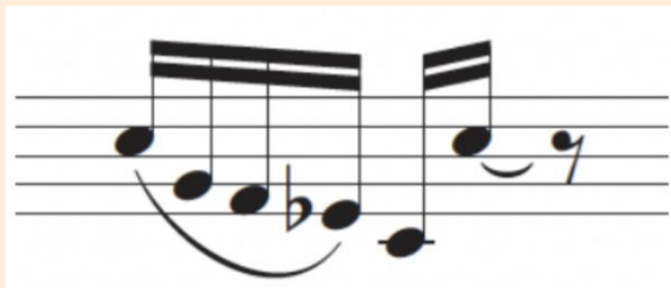
Moving beyond classical structures to create room for “play” is a central musical concept behind *Counterclassical Treatise*. So while we may be able to use classical styles in ornamentation, we also want to dig into what makes Pop, Jazz, and Gospel really shine as a **improvisational** and **intuitive** art.



What are ways that improvisation is used in musical genres you've listened to or performed?

COUNTERCLASSICAL

ORNAMENTATION



Licks

A short melodic and often **chromatic** line that directly follows the note written.



COUNTERCLASSICAL

ORNAMENTATION



Slides

A glissando between two notes. This can be either clean or messy depending on how the performer feels!



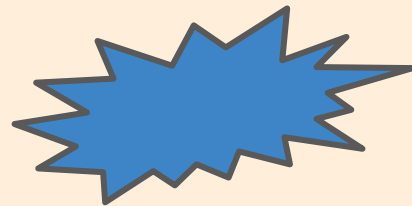
ORNAMENTATION



When instead of a simple note like a quarter, half, or whole note, a performer plays a short rhythm on the same note.



ACTIVITY



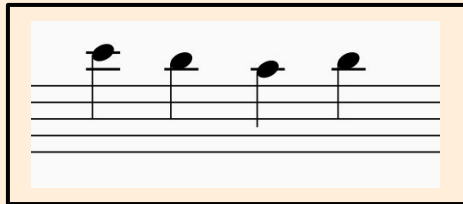
- 1) Think of a short figure - two to a million notes, but not more than 2 beats long. It can be from a piece you've already played.
- 2) On a downbeat, everyone plays their "lick" at the same time. Enjoy the cacophony!
- 3) On the next downbeat, change or add one thing - a note or a rhythm.
- 4) On the third downbeat, change or add another thing.
- 5) Change or add something with each downbeat until the lick is entirely your own!

Congratulations! You're improvising!

LET'S PLAY

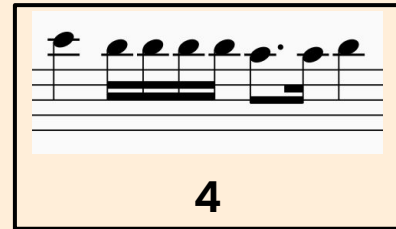
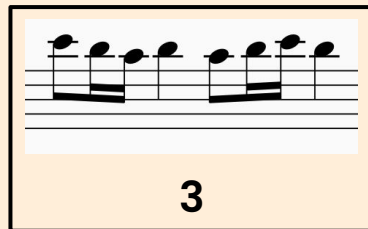
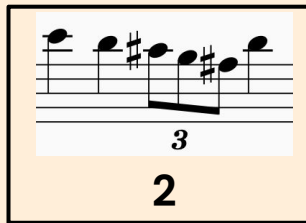
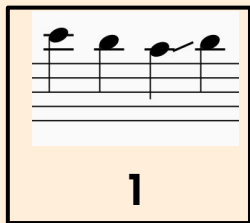
Exploring ornamentation:

Let's look at the **first measure** in the **violin part** of Kebra's Counterclassical Chorale, the first piece of the set. Take some time to imagine a few ways to use either **classical** or **counterclassical** methods to embellish **this passage**.



LET'S PLAY

Here are a few examples. Try them out on your instrument – if you need to place it in your octave, try that out as well! What type of ornamentation do you hear in these examples?



Are there ways you could ornament this passage? Try to imagine the sound first, then try playing your own version of the ornamentation.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

First things first:

Let's make sure that we know what the piece feels like *without* ornamentation. Playthrough the Counterclassical Chorale as a group from beginning to end.



How would you describe the piece without any ornamentation?

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Grouping up:

Split into sections. Using some of the ideas that you generated in our last exercise, experiment with ornamentation for the first phrase of the chorale as a group. See if you can mix and match different ideas from different classmates within your section.



What do you think makes a good improvisation? What did it feel like to improvise with your peers?

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Taking it further:

Now let's see if you can create ornaments with your group for the *entire* chorale. Go through your instrument's line with your section and see how you could intuitively add an embellishment every few measures. Remember, you don't need to ornament every measure! The goal is to create something that is fun to play and unique to your group.

Once you feel comfortable with some intuitive improvisation try and put it together with your group!

DISCUSSION



How do you feel about the piece now after hearing it with your class's unique ornamentation

How could you apply this to the other music that you play?

TAKING IT FURTHER:

Let's take what we've learned from the Counterclassical Chorale and apply it to the improvisational exercise "do u got one?" to work on our confidence and bravery in performing music with improvisational elements!

Here are some activity options:

- Repeat the improv section at a soft dynamic, and see if you can intuitively add your 'lick' once or twice during each repeat.
- During the improv accompaniment, have each section of the orchestra take turns using their 'licks' to improvise for one bar at a time. Enjoy the cacophony! As you get more confident, see if you can improvise for two bars, or even four! This is called **'trading ones'** and **'trading twos.'**
- Now that you're feeling brave, repeat the accompaniment while individual players trade twos.

DISCUSSION



What are some ways that you can get better at improvising with your friends?

When you add ornamentation, what are some of the ways it can change the feeling of the musical passage?

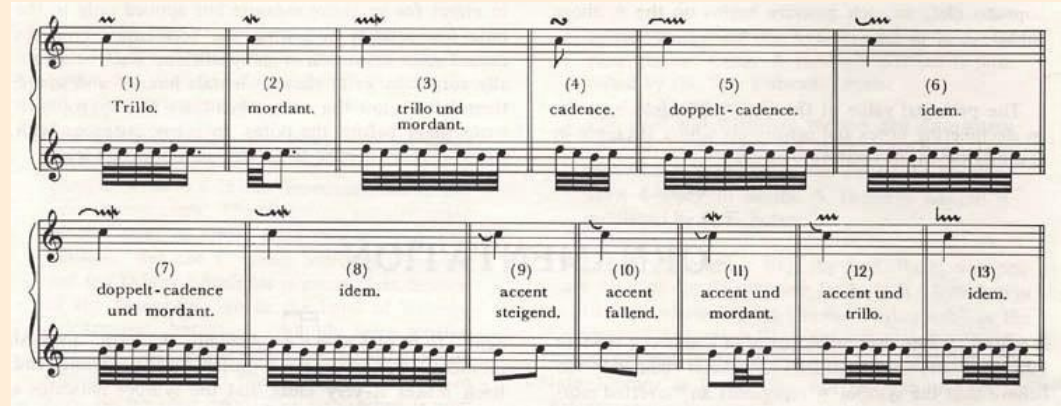
RESOURCES

What are Music Ornaments?

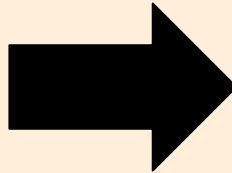
Watch this video to
learn more!



This is Johann Sebastian Bach *Ornamentation table*



Here is a video example of
How this ornaments sound
on a piano!



How Can Improvisation Deepen your Musicianship?



WOULD YOU RATHER BE:

*A musician that is trained to
recite or learn by memorization*

OR?

*A musician that has the
flexibility to use a baseline idea
to jam!*

What is Improvisation In Jazz?

Is Inventing music at the moment of performance, by building on an existing idea!

"Is all about expressing how you feel in the moment."



IS OUR GOAL TO ONLY REPRODUCE MUSIC THAT HAS BEEN WRITTEN BY OTHERS?



Check out this Ted Talk about Improvisation as a Classical musician!

PERFORMANCE PRACTICES IN GOSPEL MUSIC



TRANSFORMING A FAMILIAR TUNE

THROUGH A VARIETY OF
DIFFERENT EMOTIONS

Check out this video of
Jacob Collier Playing the
same song in 18 different
ways!



SOURCES LIST

- “What are Music Ornaments? - Basic Music Principles - Part 7”, *YouTube*, uploaded by Virtual Sheet Music, 20 of June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gMhJfp4O90>
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- “Jacob Collier Plays the Same Song In 18 Increasingly Complex Emotions | WIRED” *YouTube*, uploaded by WIRED, 6 of October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWHPdmDHrn8>
- “Why Is Improvisation so Difficult for Classical Musicians?” *YouTube*, uploaded by Nahre Sol, 28 of July 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOkgrfemsuU>
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- Diana Ross. “I'm Coming Out (Original CHIC Mix)” Provided to YouTube by Universal Music Group, 13 of December 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xMvP6PsD9A>
- “R. Strauss: Ariadne auf Naxos, Op. 60 / Prologue - Orchestral Introduction” *YouTube*, *uploaded by* Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra - Tema, 12 of December 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ9PzcUsZpM>
- Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, “One By One” *YouTube*, *uploaded by* 30 Birds Jazz, 19 of April 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSo2qgAnit0&t=1s>

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Thank you to all participants, educators, and students who have engaged with this module. Your curiosity and creativity continue to make music meaningful and impactful.