Guide to Writing Program Notes (Composers see page 2):

Generally, program notes should include the following two types of information:

1. Biographical Information about the Composer: If the composer is well known, you should focus on biographical details relevant to the piece you are performing. If the composer is lesser known, you might want to include a more general biography that contextualizes them with more familiar historical figures.
2. Information about the piece: This section should guide listeners through the experience of the piece. Without getting to technical, you can talk about form, about significant gestures, or other recognizable musical features that you want them to listen for.

Citation of Sources:

Program notes are not traditionally presented as academic writing, however you still need to avoid plagiarism. You should never just reprint verbatim what someone else wrote and claim it as your own (which is what your are doing if you do not cite sources)—that is intellectual theft. That said, rather than using footnotes and a bibliography, as you might with academic papers, you should work the author and title of the book or article into your prose. In place of a bibliography, a brief list of “sources for more information on the music” or “works cited” should be included at the end of the notes section.

When to cite: You must cite the source of any direct quotation you use. You can work the citation into the text of your notes. For example: “Leo Treitler notes in *Music and the Historical Imagination*. . .”.

You must cite a source you are summarizing content from, even if you are paraphrasing it in your own words.

You must cite the translator of any translation you use that is not your own work. This can be done by adding “translated by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” after the translation in the program.

Guide to Writing Program Notes (modified for Composition):

Program notes for Composition Recitals should:

1. provide the audience with insight into the work that may not be readily apparent
2. draw the listener into the composition such that they will be more receptive to their experience

To achieve these points, composers may consider including the following:

* Technical aspects (form/structure, language, method of composition)
* Logistical elements (commissioner, date of completion/premiere, intended audience)
* Compositional influences
* Inspiration for the work
* Other information (your compositional process, how this piece fits into your output, personal information/anecdotes that could aid the listener, your intention in composing the piece, etc.)

\*Program notes should include some (but likely not all) of the above.

Citation of Sources:

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**Program Notes**

**Henry Purcell** is said to have been one of the greatest English composers, flourishing in the period that followed the Restoration of the monarchy after the Puritan Commonwealth period. He was the son of a musician at Court, and spent much of his short life in the service of the Chapel Royal as a composer, organist and singer. He wrote only one full opera- the tragic story of *Dido and Aeneas*, along with a considerable quantity of solo songs. These solo songs and the songs for two or more voices offer a particularly rich repertoire, exemplified by the song Music For a While, from the play *Oedipus* and “Man Is For a Woman Made”, from *The Mock Marriage*. “His sensitivity to his texts has been matched by few masters in musical history; when he had worthy poetry to set, he could hardly fail to produce a masterpiece.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

**Come All Ye Songsters** is from Act two of Purcell’s semi-opera *The Fairy Queen*, which is based on William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The setting is a palace in Athens, Greece, and nearby forest in legendary times. Act two takes place in a moonlit wood, where Titania and her fairies merrily revel by singing this song, until the allegorical characters Night, Mystery, Secrecy and Sleep lull them to pleasant dreams.

The Third version of**If Music be the Food of Love** is an excellent example of Purcell’s fine ability of text setting. Throughout the piece there are several melismatic passages, which are wonderful examples of word painting. For example, he sets the fastest-moving notes on the words “joy” and “move”. Also, in the more upbeat allegretto section, he builds on the word “fierce” by using the same rhythmic motif and raising it a step in pitch until it finally reaches a major sixth above where it started. A third example is where he sets each repeating word “sound” on quarter notes, creating a feeling of small drops of sound. Finally, the last section, which speaks of “perishing”, arrives back at the original andante sostenuto tempo. Purcell ends the piece with one last melisma, which gradually slows down to a whole note. This creates a feeling of finally settling into place in someone’s arms, which is how the piece ends.

 ~~~~~ **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** was born in Salzburg as the last of seven children born to Leopold Mozart and Maria Anna Pertl. He was one of two only surviving children, and was a child prodigy, to say the least. From the time he was four years old, he was playing keyboard, and by age five he composed his first melodies. He was an outstanding violin player as well as a virtuosic keyboard player. He had a tremendous musical memory and could play written music from the first time he saw it. Leopold traveled with Wolfgang throughout Western Europe, including Vienna, Austria, London, Paris and Versailles, France, and Italy. In 1767, when Mozart was only 11, he wrote his first opera *Apollo et Hyacinthus*. After the mid-1780’s his main focus was on opera. Mozart made a number of trips in his last years. In 1791, he passed away when he developed a fever of unknown origin. “Mozart's best music has a natural flow and irresistible charm, and can express humor, joy or sorrow with both conviction and mastery”.[[2]](#endnote-2)

1. Sartorius, Michael. February 23, 2009. <http://www.baroquemusic.org/bqxpurcell.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cummings, Robert. February 24, 2009. <http://www.classicalarchives.com/mozart.html#about> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)