

Tutorials in Musicology

The Anglican choral tradition

Students in Oxford find themselves in one of the best places in the world to hear and sing Anglican choral music. Oxford has three choral foundations where men (and now a few women!) and boys sing daily services (Christ Church, New College, and Magdalen), and many where mixed adult voices sing services and give concerts, with some aiming for excellent standards (Queen's, Merton) and others aiming more to contribute to college life. The music that they sing dates from the Reformation onwards, when composers responded to the need to provide new music, largely in the vernacular, and for new services, like matins and evensong. Whatever the particular focus of the student, listening, understanding how the music works in liturgical context, and close study of scores and texts are the foundations of this tutorial. Students can explore the works of Elizabethan composers like Tallis and Byrd (curiously both Catholic) and many others who established the Anglican tradition; the contribution of Baroque composer Henry Purcell after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660; the Victorian and Edwardian revival and the works of composers such as Charles Villiers Stanford; and more recent composers who often combine new tonalities and medieval texts but still work within the traditional liturgy. Students may consider the role of pre-Reformation music sung with Anglican services, and think about the roles of institutions such as the Chapels Royal, Royal School of Church Music, and Oxford and Cambridge colleges, particularly King's College, Cambridge, whose radio and television broadcasts have done much to establish a global audience for this very English tradition.

Music and worship

This tutorial gives students the opportunity to consider how music has contributed to worship in a variety of traditions. An obvious component is the Anglican choral tradition, which flourished in the Elizabethan period as composers responded to the need for new music suitable for post-Reformation doctrine and practice, experienced a revival in the Victorian and Edwardian music, and flourishes today with modern settings many of which combine medieval texts with modern tonalities. Institutions, from the Chapels Royal, parish churches, cathedrals, and Oxford and Cambridge colleges to the Royal School of Church Music, sustain such music, and their role can be explored. Students will have many opportunities to hear and perhaps sing Anglican music. They can also explore other traditions including pre-Reformation masses and anthems, and Bach's sacred music which sought a distinctively Lutheran voice. The main focus will be on vocal music but the place of instrumental, particularly organ, music in worship may also be considered. Church music for children might be another focus. All students will develop their ability to listen to and analyse sacred music, and students interested in composition and harmony may have the chance to set sacred texts or write chorales in the style of Bach. The focus is primarily on music, but students may also consider theological and practical aspects of using music to enhance worship.

Composition

Students with some grounding in music theory and harmony and counterpoint are welcome to take this tutorial, which focuses mainly on the Western musical canon but considers a wide variety of genres within it. Students will have the chance to analyse music and do technical exercises (such as, harmonizing chorales in the style of Bach, writing fugues, writing string quartets, orchestration, word setting). Concurrently students will work on their own pieces, integrating the techniques they have learnt with their own creative ideas.

Music before c.1780: medieval, Baroque, and Classical

Students taking this tutorial can discover the riches of music before the later eighteenth century, getting a broad sense of development over the period while always focusing on listening to and studying particular pieces of music in detail. As well as studying the music itself, you can consider contextual questions such as church and court patronage, and how historically informed performance has changed our understanding of early music. Oxford has particularly rich opportunities for listening to live performance of music from this period, including in daily sung services and frequent organ recitals (all free!) to professional and fine amateur performances. Professional groups based in Oxford include Fretwork (a viol consort), Contrapunctus (an early music vocal group), and the Oxford Bach Soloists (dedicated to performing Bach's complete choral oeuvre). There is generally a string quartet in residence at the University, and Keble College Early Music Festival combines performance and workshops each Hilary Term. For those intrigued by early instruments there are two important collections in the University, at the Ashmolean and at the Oxford's Bate Collection of Musical Instruments. If you are interested in early music, this tutorial gives you a chance to pursue it in a way that is unlikely to be available to you again.

Music after c.1780: Romanticism and Beyond

Students taking this tutorial can discover the riches of music after about 1750, getting a broad sense of development over the period while always focusing on listening to and studying particular pieces of music in detail. You can explore the emergence of Romantic music, noting its connection with philosophy, literature, and the visual arts; the development of symphonic music; atonality, its possibilities and limits; and contemporary music including electronic music. As well as studying the music itself, you can consider contextual questions such as the development of public concert halls and opera houses; the development of the orchestra; the effect of nationalism on music; and how technology has affected composition and the construction of musical instruments. Oxford provides good opportunities to listen to choral music from this period, and excellent opportunities to hear organ music. The symphonic repertoire is performed in the city by the University Orchestra and the professional Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Welsh National Opera company brings large-scale opera to the city. London, a short train or bus ride away, has remarkable opportunities to hear orchestral and chamber music from the period and to see opera of all genres.