

## **Module 6**

### **For FLCL 271H (Classical Mythology: Honors Section)**

### **Studying a Musical Version of a Myth**

#### **Course**

Classical Mythology: Honors FLCL 271H 3 semester hours

The honors component of Classical Mythology is intended to give students a deeper understanding of the subject and its relationship to other academic areas such as art, music, and psychology. Each student must complete a project that involves reading one or more pieces of Ancient Greek and/or Roman literature in translation.

#### **Module 6: Description**

This module encourages students to listen to recorded music and/or to view videos of musical works in order to study the influence of Ancient Greek and Roman mythology on music, particularly classical music.

Ancient Greek and Roman myths have inspired countless musical compositions, ranging from Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony* to Elton John's *The Muse*. Ideally, a piece of music related to the mythological subject of the day would be playing as the students enter the classroom. Realistically, unless the teacher has a large collection of music on audiocassettes or on CD discs and unless he or she is able to get to the classroom before the students, the playing of music in class happens occasionally. The myth of Orpheus, the subject of famous operas by Monteverdi, Gluck, and Offenbach, has especially strong ties to music.

As their mythology project, assign the students to give a presentation on a piece of classical music that was inspired by a mythological subject. To aid the students who have a limited knowledge of music, hand out a list of appropriate musical compositions.

The student's presentation should include the following:

- A discussion of a myth as the ancient writers tell it

Having consulted a relevant article in a dictionary of mythology, such as Edward Tripp (Ed.), *The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology*, or G. M. Howatson (Ed.), *Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, to discover the primary sources of the myth, the student should consult those sources. (Module 1 discusses how and where to find primary sources in translation.)

- A discussion of the myth as it appears in the musical piece

Students will find that generally the myth has been altered in some way. In his burlesque opera, *Orphee aux Enfers*, Offenbach drastically changes both the plot and the tone of the original myth. Maurice Ravel's ballet, *Daphnis et Chloe*, the scenery

of which was designed by Marc Chagall, is set in modern times in New York and has almost nothing to do with the ancient story.

- A thumbnail sketch of the composer and his style of music
- Comments on the musical style of the piece
- A representative selection from the piece

A student who plays a musical instrument should be encouraged to find a piece of music especially suited to his or her particular instrument. As part of the project, the student could perform for the class or play a recording of him- or herself playing a selection. Students who do not play instruments or who do not wish to perform could play a selection on cassette or disc.

The audio-video collections of most libraries contain very well-known musical works. Lesser known works, such as *Bacchus et Ariane* by Albert Roussel, are sometimes difficult to find. Performances of them in CD format usually can be purchased (if the student wishes to sustain the expense) at large music stores such as Tower Records.

Some musical selections may be found on World Wide Web sites; however, special software, such as *Microsoft Media Player* or *Real Player*, is needed to listen to them.

- A handout (prepared using *Word* or *WordPerfect* software) that summarizes the information presented

For research on musical subjects, several World Wide Web sites should prove especially helpful to both student and teacher:

- *Classical Net*  
[www.classical.net/](http://www.classical.net/)

This website has links to pages on the life and works of various composers (often with a picture of the composer); to reviews, articles, books, and scores; and to MIDI and sheet music archives.

- *Coordinated Opera Resource Pages Composers and Their Operas*  
[www.operabase.com.com/corpus/operas.html](http://www.operabase.com.com/corpus/operas.html)

This website features a list of 133 composers and their operas, a list of 239 operas by title, and links to other recommended resources.

- *Rick Bogart's Opera Glass*  
<http://opera.stanford.edu/>

This website has links to libretti, source texts, performance history, synopses, and discographies.

- *Bob's Opera World*  
[www.intac.com/~rfrone/raf-oper.htm](http://www.intac.com/~rfrone/raf-oper.htm)

This website provides plot summaries of 200 operas. A link called *Bob's MIDI Music Page* lists all files included on all the pages of the site and links to them. A note advises visitors that a plug-in is needed to play a file and a sound card is required to hear it.

Music and sound files come in several file types, including au, wav, aif, mp3, mpeg, and midi. For an example of a MIDI file, go to <[www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/beethoven.html](http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/beethoven.html)> and click on "Piano Sonata I."

Information about MIDI software and directions for saving MIDI files may be found at

- *MIDI Players, MIDI Plugins & Karaoke Players: Freeware for Playing MIDI Files*  
[www.aitech.ac.jp/~ckelly/help/](http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~ckelly/help/)

MIDI files cannot contain voice (singing), so they would not be used for any sung opera music; however, a student could work with a text version of the opera and a MIDI version of the music (no words). A free MP3 player is offered through <[www.mp3.com/](http://www.mp3.com/)>.

### ***Alternative Project***

Follow Module 3, but substitute a video of an opera on a mythological subject (e.g., Hector Berlioz's *Les Troyens* for a myth-based tragedy).

### **Transferability**

This module can be used in a music appreciation class; in a Humanities class; and, since many libretti are in languages other than English, in an upper-level foreign language class. The skills practiced can be used to enhance personal entertainment.

### **Faculty Technology Skill**

- Ability to use audiocassette player, CD player, or computer CD player
- Ability to search the Internet

### **Student Technology Skill**

- Ability to use audiocassette player and/or CD player
- Ability to search the Internet for music

### **Faculty Equipment**

- Audiocassette player and/or CD player

- Computer with access to the Internet and speakers

### **Student Equipment**

- Audiocassette player or CD player
- Computer with Internet access, speakers, and a printer

### **Benefits of Technological vs. Traditional Presentation**

Hearing a musical composition is obviously better than simply reading about it. Continually improving audio technology makes possible very realistic reproduction of musical performances and, thereby, facilitates the study of music. Works come in many forms: CDs, DVDs, audio- and videocassettes, and LPs. Live performances are broadcast on radio and television. Many radio stations can be accessed with a computer; however, the sound is often rather choppy. A few websites on which music may be listened to (with the appropriate software) are excellent, but many sites featuring music disappear quickly—perhaps as a result of the violation of copyright laws. Much information about musical composers and their works can be easily accessed at any time.

### **Language Resource Center Usage**

In the language resource center, the students could visit the websites mentioned above to find information about composers and their works on mythological subjects. They could also search the Web, using a general search engine such as Google. In the search box, they would type in the name of a composer, a work, or of both. Adding WAV after the title of a musical piece limits the results to musical performances that can be accessed with a computer. If the language resource center has the proper software, the students could actually listen to selections.

### **Internet Resources**

*Classical Net*

[www.classical.net/](http://www.classical.net/)

*Coordinated Opera Resource Pages*

[www.operabase.com.com/corpus/operas.html](http://www.operabase.com.com/corpus/operas.html)

*Composers and Their Operas*

*Rick Bogart's Opera Glass*

<http://opera.stanford.edu/>

*Bob's Opera World*

[www.intac.com/~rfrone/raf-oper.htm](http://www.intac.com/~rfrone/raf-oper.htm)

*Classical Music*

[www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/beethoven.html](http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/beethoven.html)

*MIDI Players, MIDI Plugins & Karaoke Players: Freeware for Playing MIDI Files*

[www.aitech.ac.jp/~ckelly/help/](http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~ckelly/help/)

*MP3*  
[www.mp3.com/](http://www.mp3.com/)