Sound and Vision: The Interwoven History of Visual Art and Music
Course Syllabus

Course Description

Art and music have always been partners in shaping the human experience—two voices telling the same story across centuries. This course invites you on a journey through time, where brushstrokes and musical notes collide, echoing the emotions, revolutions, and innovations of every era.

What does a Gothic cathedral sound like? How did Renaissance painters and composers both chase the perfect balance of form and harmony? Why did Romantic artists and musicians lean into drama, passion, and rebellion? Each era has its own creative language, and understanding the connections between visual and musical expression unlocks a deeper appreciation of how culture evolves.

One of the most fascinating intersections of art and music is opera—a genre that fuses painting, architecture, theater, storytelling, and composition into one immersive experience. As we explore the evolution of opera, we'll see how it acts as a mirror to history, pulling together all the elements of an era into a single performance.

For educators, this course offers fresh ways to connect the arts in the classroom, bridging disciplines to show students how creativity moves across time and medium. Whether you teach art, music, history, or humanities, these insights will provide engaging narratives and interdisciplinary approaches that bring history alive in a way that feels dynamic, relevant, and inspiring.

This course enhances classroom teaching effectiveness and supports improved student outcomes by introducing new knowledge in the interdisciplinary connections between art and music throughout history, offering educators creative strategies to engage students across the arts and humanities.

Course Objectives
At the end of this course you should be able to:

1. Analyze how Western art and music evolved as interconnected forms of cultural expression, with influence from ancient Greece and Rome's pursuit of harmony, order, and the divine.
2. Analyze how medieval art and music functioned as expressions of religious devotion, power, and symbolism, to shape the artistic and musical identity of the period.

3. Examine how Renaissance artists and composers embraced humanism, scientific inquiry, and individual expression, transforming visual and musical storytelling through the rediscovery of classical texts and artifacts.
4. Identify the defining characteristics of Baroque art and music -- contrast, movement, and theatricality and see how these elements shaped new artistic and musical forms, particularly the emergence of opera.
5. Differentiate the Classical era's emphasis on clarity, balance, and emotional restraint from preceding artistic and musical movements.
6. Investigate how Romantic artists and composers celebrated emotion, individuality, and imagination, transforming artistic and musical expression—especially in opera as a dramatic and emotionally immersive storytelling medium.
7. Examine how modernist artists and composers rejected tradition through abstraction, dissonance, and experimentation in response to shifting cultural, political, and technological landscapes.
8. Critique how postmodern artists and composers challenge artistic and musical conventions, deconstruct past paradigms, and reshape ideas of originality, authorship, and meaning in creative expression.

Modules

- Module 1: The Visual and the Audible: Art, Music, and the Fabric of Western Culture, Quiz 1
- Module 2: Illuminating the Age: Art and Music in Medieval Times, Quiz 2
- Module 3: Rebirth of Wonder: Art and Music of the Italian Renaissance, Quiz 3
- Module 4: From Canvas to Cantata: Art and Music of the Baroque Era, Quiz 4
- Module 5: Harmony and Order: Art and Music in the Classical Era, Quiz 5
- Module 6: Passion and Power: Art, Music, and Ideas in the Romantic Era, Quiz 6
- Module 7: Dismantling Tradition: The Radical Language of Modernism, Quiz 7
- Module 8: Remix, Reinvent, Repeat: Postmodern Art & Music, Quiz 8

Grading:

Each quiz must be passed at an 80% or higher (three attempts allowed).

Format

This is a self-paced, asynchronous (no required live meetings) course. Throughout the PD course, you will find it helpful to take notes along the way to assist with the quizzes. Within each module, you will find reflection assessments that are not graded but will help in your journey through the course. There is an interactive forum in the course to help you connect with peers and instructors, share ideas, and collaborate on best practices throughout your learning journey.