

**Instrumental Chamber Ensembles
University of Waterloo Department of Music
Conrad Grebel University College**

Spring 2020

1. **Welcome** to Conrad Grebel University College Instrumental Chamber Ensembles. We are glad to have you join us and hope you realize how valuable you are to this ensemble. The ensemble you are placed in cannot function without you. The efforts you put forth will not only benefit you but also the other members of your ensemble. The first audition date is on Thursday, May 7 from 9:30am to 12, and the second opportunity to audition is on Monday, May 11 from 9:30am to 12pm, in room 1209 (Ensemble Rehearsal room). Bring a paper copy of your class schedule and an Ensemble Participant form with you to the audition. Please sign up online: <https://uwaterloo.ca/music/ensembles>.
2. **Attendance Policy:** By joining the ensemble, you are making a commitment to each other. Regular, punctual attendance is the first and most basic part of commitment. Absences are only excusable in the case of severe illness and family emergencies. After two missed rehearsals you must contact the director for possible re-audition. These rules apply to credit, non-credit and community members. “Lates” add up to absences. **If you know you are going to be absent or late you must contact the members of your ensemble.** You may not contact the director or members of the ensemble by email unless it can be received the day prior to your absence.
3. **Placement:** You will be placed in an ensemble according to your ability, availability, and the balance needed for your choice of instrument.
4. **Concerts:**

**The concert for the end of the term is scheduled for:
Sunday, July 26 from 7:30-9:00 pm in the Chapel
Dress rehearsal from 4:00-7:00 pm prior to the concert.**

5. **Music** of considerable value has been loaned to you. Please take very good care of it. Use pencil only. You will be charged full replacement cost for any music defaced or not returned immediately after the final concert.
6. **Rehearsals and Practising:** Each ensemble will receive one hour of coaching per week. Each ensemble will be expected to rehearse on their own a minimum of one hour per week above and beyond this at a mutually agreeable time. I encourage you to rehearse more than this as every hour of rehearsal will add to your personal fulfilment and the end result. In the same vein, players will be expected to practise their own parts.

Thank-you for attention to all the above, I look forward to this term with you.

Ben Bolt-Martin
519 576-7312
bboltmartin@gmail.com

Why Play Chamber Music?

Chamber music, defined as music performed with one player per part, is a unique opportunity for performers to express themselves. Chamber music is rehearsed and performed in a collaborative setting without the intervention of a conductor. As a result, the individual parts become an expression of the individuals who perform them. As well, the process offers a rich opportunity to explore music in an intense way and to experiment with rehearsal techniques and musical ideas.

How does one best learn to express one's self through chamber music? The following are some basic principles to make your chamber music experience the most fulfilling possible.

Rules for Rehearsing.

You have to show up. Okay, I know it sounds kind of obvious that you need to be at rehearsals, but there will come a time during the semester, regardless of your major, when you'd rather be somewhere else (studying for exam, doing a paper) than at the chamber music rehearsal or coaching that you have scheduled. The reality of the situation is that all you're really being asked to commit is two hours per week, and the commitment is for the whole semester. Plan on one rehearsal and one coaching per week for the whole semester and expect to attend all of them.

Be on time. "On time" means five minutes early, with your instrument and music, so you can have a full hour (or more) of rehearsal. It's a good idea to schedule rehearsals the way you would classes, taking travel time into account so you won't be late.

Respect the other members of your ensemble. The first points will go a long way to accomplishing this, but respect takes many forms in an ensemble.

1. Assume that the other members are giving their best and give your best as well.
2. Be open to trying out musical ideas. (Arguing is a much less effective way to make musical decisions than playing a passage a number of ways).
3. Compliment each others' playing regularly.
4. Criticize carefully, and in specific, non-judgemental terms. For example:
not okay: "You're playing too slow", "You're playing out of tune".
better: "We didn't arrive together at bar ... ", "I would like to play (x note) at bar (x) sharper".

Tune Carefully as often as you need to. For a start, tune at the beginning of every rehearsal, and once you're all warmed up (about twenty minutes in). The regular practice of tuning your instrument to the other instruments in your ensemble will make you more aware of tuning in general, make your ensemble's tuning more consistent and will make it easier to tune in front of the audience when it comes time to perform. (see *Performing* below).

Learn your part. A few hours of practising early in the semester (when you're more likely to have time) is actually worth more than the same amount later on (when you're busy with midterms).

Listen to several recordings of your piece, if available. Just listening a few times can save a lot of practise and rehearsal time. You can often find recordings through Trellis or through the online classical recordings on the UW library page. You can also buy music or order it from Twelfth Night Music Shop in the Atrium plaza (across the hall from the Duke of Wellington).

What should I aim for when I play chamber music? (What should we rehearse?)

Here are a few basic ideas (or ideals?) to aim for in a chamber music performance.

Play together. In a "bean counter" sort of way, playing together means starting and finishing your notes together. In a more artistic sense, playing together extends well beyond this, to playing notes in the same way, and with the same "intention". An extension of playing together is to:

Phrase together. For a start, everyone should pay very close attention to the clues which the composer has taken the time to sketch in for you: dynamics and other words, often in Italian. From there, each group needs to make its own decisions as to what these markings mean. (For example, does *pp* in a given place suggest sadness, nervousness, expectation, etc.?) It is this sort of decision which is at the heart of rehearsing chamber music.

Keep a consistent tempo together. This is best accomplished by constantly counting, whether in your head, or out loud (during rehearsals, obviously, not during performances). Counting not only helps to reenter after rests and stay together during difficult rhythmic passages, but helps you to understand how the pulse of the music contributes to the ebb and flow of the phrases.

Play in tune. It should be noted that playing in tune with other players is as much a process of give-and-take and compromise as decisions on phrasing, musical meaning, etc. Even in the presence of a piano, there can be a wide variety of opinions on the "location" of an in tune note, the validity of which are dependent on whatever system a group decides to use. This is all just to say, please do not assume that what you hear as "in tune" will be more valid than what another musician hears as "in tune".

Performing.

Here are a few pieces of advice for performing, mostly gleaned from mistakes I have made (and continue to make).

Bowing. (That is, bending from the waist). The purpose of bowing is to acknowledge your audience, to make them feel comfortable with you and to show that you appreciate that they have agreed to come and listen to you share what you've created.

Walk quickly to your spot. The audience will clap for you. Once you arrive at your spot, smile at the audience and bend deeply from the waist *before you put your music on the stand*. (Women often put one hand up to the opposite shoulder... you can figure out why). Even if the audience's applause seems to slow down before you start to bow, bow anyway.

Tuning. Please remember, *There is Always time to Tune!* Tune exactly as you would in a rehearsal. It will always seem to take a long time, but make sure you tune thoroughly. Colleagues, make sure not to make faces while your partners are tuning, and don't offer advice unless asked. Instead, if you are not tuning, use the time to (quietly!) check your music, to make sure your pages are in order, your music stand or piano bench is adjusted, etc.

Dress. There are very few hard and fast conventions as to how to dress for a chamber music concert. Rarely do chamber players dress in tuxes anymore, but it is important to convey to your audience that you and your colleagues are unified in your commitment to the music, and that you take yourselves seriously.

No one would ever mistake me for a fashion icon, but in order not to feel out of place, I would suggest that, as a basic rule, for men a shirt and tie and for women, either a long skirt or dress pants with an appropriate shirt would work just fine. If, as a group, you can come up with attire that conveys your commitment to the performance while maintaining an appropriate level of couture, then by all means do so.

Communicating. Performing can be very scary, and a big part of this has to do with the internal dialogue most of us go through when we step out in front of people, whether it be a couple of your friends or a crowd of hundreds. Luckily, as chamber musicians, we have a built-in remedy for this: colleagues, who can help us get out of our own heads and focus on the task of creating beautiful music together. During every chamber performance, continue to look each other in the eye, listen to each other play and give each other support. Wonderful things happen when an ensemble becomes their own best audience during a performance.

Post performance. When you've played your last note, smile at your colleagues and stand up proudly to receive your applause. Look at the audience, look at each other again and then bow deeply from the waist. If your audience is applauding strongly, bow again and then walk quickly off stage. If your audience continues to applaud strongly after you have left the stage, they are encouraging you to return to the stage for another bow. Walk quickly to the middle of the stage, bow quickly and leave again, smiling the whole time.

A Couple of Final Thoughts

Great Musicians are also Music Fans. This has become imminently clear over my brief career. Go to any concert and you'll find musicians in the crowd: supporting their friends, checking out the competition or just excited to hear music. Believe it or not, it is the best musicians that you see most often at others' concerts.

Keep this in mind and plan to go see concerts this semester. There are a lot of concerts happening on campus, and there are posters for these outside the music office. The Music Department runs a series of noon hour concerts on Wednesday. <https://uwaterloo.ca/music/events>. The [Kitchener Waterloo Chamber Music Society](#) is a very walkable distance from UW and has dozens of great concerts each semester. As well, the [Kitchener Waterloo Symphony](#) is a first rate ensemble with very exciting series and student discounts.

A quick note about supporting each other. Whether it is a masterclass, recital or any other concert, I am always surprised and disappointed when students ask me whether they *have* to stick around after they've finished playing to hear their colleagues. Give it some thought.