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COMMON PRACTICE

Main-street classical music for community and contemplation.

San Francisco, California

www.commonpractice.life

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COMMON PRACTICE is a new performance concept for classical music that offers live listening sessions in an accessible storefront space. Each session is just 30–40 minutes long and built around a focused expressive idea—either a single piece or a curated set.

The space is set up casually with benches, chairs, and cushions closely surrounding the musicians. The audience numbers around 10–20 people at a time, and each session is repeated multiple times for different groups.

The experience is positioned as a contemplative community activity and advertised with a set of listening notes (similar to wine or coffee tasting) describing the expressive experience and benefits of hearing that particular music.

Afterwards, listeners are invited to fill out a card with their own impressions, and to compare notes if they want to. A simple coffee or tea service follows the music.

MISSION

Common Practice’s mission is to offer radically accessible drop-in classical music sessions as a reflective community practice for leading a good life.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our target audience is arts-inclined people ages 25–40 who are curious about classical music but may not have previously engaged with it in traditional settings. This includes people from across the Bay Area who come specifically for Common Practice and other downtown popups, as well as hybrid workers interested in an after-work activity on their in-office days. A secondary target is people interested in other wellness and mindfulness activities, such as meditation and yoga.

Common Practice is radically accessible: low-cost, informal, convenient in length, and requiring little planning or preparation to attend.

“Several recent surveys have clocked a rise in the popularity of classical music in the last couple of years . . . drawing more women and younger listeners, and it’s soaring among content creators on social media.” —*The New York Times*

PROMOTION PLAN

Common Practice positions live classical music as a contemplative community activity, emphasizing specific expressive qualities of pieces and the personal, social, and spiritual benefits of focused listening.

Our promotion plan includes:

1. An email list of approximately 1,000 Bay Area residents who have attended previous classical events.
2. A website with information and schedule (www.commonpractice.life).
3. Scheduling sessions around the most active times in the neighborhood and collaborating with other businesses and popups to cross-promote.
4. Contacting nearby employers and coordinating our schedule with their in-office days.
5. Attractive signs and a welcoming, open atmosphere for walk-ins.
6. Promotion to each performer's own contacts.
7. Strong media contacts among the local media and arts press.

LISTENING NOTES

Each piece is advertised with listening notes that offer a clear description of the music and some suggestions for why someone might choose to hear it in particular.

<p>DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Trio No. 2</p> <p>Violin, Cello, and Piano Soviet Union, 1944 30 min</p> <p><i>An otherworldly opening gives way to a woozy middle, culminating in a surprising transformation and lingering end.</i></p> <p>Tragic ●○○○○ Joyful Relaxing ○○○●○ Stimulating Cerebral ○○○●○ Emotional</p> <p>For: dealing with loss, finding closure, seeing new possibilities</p>	<p>JULIUS EASTMAN Gay Guerrilla</p> <p>Two Pianos United States, 1979 30 min</p> <p><i>One repeated note morphs into mesmerizing, repetitive rhythms and gradually shifting harmonies. Washes over you and weaves a trance-like state, culminating in a wild, joyful hymn.</i></p> <p>Tragic ○○○○○● Joyful Relaxing ○○○●○ Stimulating Cerebral ○○○●○ Emotional</p> <p>For: feeling transported, finding courage and hope</p>
<p>JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH Suite No. 3</p> <p>Solo Cello Germany, c. 1720 20 min</p> <p><i>A bold prelude leads into a flight of five dances, mostly exuberant, but with a contemplative contrast at the center.</i></p> <p>Tragic ○○○○○● Joyful Relaxing ○●○○○ Stimulating Cerebral ○○○●○ Emotional</p> <p>For: lifting mood, increasing creativity, enjoying solitude</p>	<p>CLARA SCHUMANN Piano Trio</p> <p>Violin, Cello, and Pianos Germany, 1864 28 min</p> <p><i>Sweeps you up in romantic turmoil, then shows a sweeter side. The middle is a meltingly beautiful song. Stormy weather returns, but makes you want to revel in the wind and rain.</i></p> <p>Tragic ○●○○○ Joyful Relaxing ○○○●○ Stimulating Cerebral ○○○●○ Emotional</p> <p>For: releasing emotions, finding closure</p>

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE

This is a sample schedule for 16 sessions over three days (4 pieces repeated 4 times). Each session starts on the hour and lasts about 30 minutes. Then there is another 30 minutes for lingering and turnover before the next session.

Friday Evening

6pm	Dmitri Shostakovich Piano Trio No. 1
7pm	Julius Eastman <i>Gay Guerrilla for Two Pianos</i>
8pm	Dmitri Shostakovich Piano Trio No. 1
9pm	Julius Eastman <i>Gay Guerrilla for Two Pianos</i>

Saturday Afternoon

12pm	Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No. 3 for Solo Cello
1pm	Clara Schumann Piano Trio
2pm	Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No. 3 for Solo Cello
3pm	Clara Schumann Piano Trio

Saturday Evening

6pm	Dmitri Shostakovich Piano Trio No. 1
7pm	Julius Eastman <i>Gay Guerrilla for Two Pianos</i>
8pm	Dmitri Shostakovich Piano Trio No. 1
9pm	Julius Eastman <i>Gay Guerrilla for Two Pianos</i>

Sunday Afternoon

12pm	Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No. 3 for Solo Cello
1pm	Clara Schumann Piano Trio
2pm	Johann Sebastian Bach Suite No. 3 for Solo Cello
3pm	Clara Schumann Piano Trio

OPERATIONS

- Our musicians will include professional Bay Area ensembles, freelancers, and advanced college students.
- We will begin with a pay-what-you-wish system for listeners, offering a QR code for a suggested online payment (\$5, \$15, or \$30) at the conclusion of each session.

Space, Equipment, and Furnishings

- 900sf retail space (exterior facing open floor plan)
- Grand piano (rental)
- Musician chairs and stands
- Mixed audience seating (benches, couches, café chairs, armchairs, floor cushions, etc.)
- Signage (large format posters, sandwich board, letter board, etc.)
- Coffee maker and hot water
- Coffee cups
- Wi-fi

INCLUSION

We are committed to creating an inclusive, welcoming environment for listeners of all backgrounds, and will engage musicians who represent the diversity of the Bay Area.

We think of classical music broadly as traditions of contemplative, mostly acoustic music from around the world that bring people together for focused listening. Though our own training is mostly in Western classical music, we also want to develop connections with other traditions including Indian classical music, Persian classical music, and jazz.

TEAM

Benjamin Pesetsky is a composer and writer. His music has been performed by Tapestry Opera, WordSong, Shakespeare Concerts, and the Guerilla Composers Guild and Phonochrome Collective. He currently serves on the staff of the San Francisco Symphony and has also worked as a freelance writer, editor, and consultant for the St. Louis Symphony, Tippet Rise Art Center, Melbourne Symphony, and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. He has been an artist in residence at the Banff Centre and Hambidge Center and earned degrees in composition and philosophy from Bard College and Bard College Conservatory.

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Allegra Chapman is an omnivorous pianist, adventurous curator, and passionate educator. Her performances have been called “fervid but impeccably controlled” by the San Francisco Chronicle and “brilliant” by the San Francisco Classical voice. She was the founding co-artistic director and executive director of the critically acclaimed festival Bard Music West, a founding member of the Phonochrome Collective, and has been a member of the Left Coast Chamber Ensemble and Delphi Trio. She received her master’s degree from the Juilliard School and earned dual bachelor’s degrees in piano and history from Bard College Conservatory and Bard College. She is on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory’s Pre-College division.

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