

MUS9521Y: Resources and Current Areas of Research in Music Theory

Fall–Winter 2017–2018 / Don Wright Faculty of Music / Western University

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Office hours: by appointment (TC 218)

Class meetings: Tuesdays, 1:30–4:30 pm, TC 310

Overview

Music theory is commonly understood as a system that classifies musical materials—from pitches to chords to forms—and defines the rules that govern them. From this perspective, music theory is essentially didactic, offering definitive answers to basic musical questions. Yet throughout its long history, music theory has been a site of contentious, unresolved debates. And these debates reveal possibilities for music-theoretical *research*, for new questions and new ideas about music—and about music theory itself.

In this course, we will explore questions that have shaped music theory as a contemporary academic discipline: How does music theory relate to analysis? Can theory and analysis account for musical meaning, pleasure, or value? Must they consider composers' intentions or listeners' experiences? What kinds of evidence ground their claims? What kinds of objects do they study (scores, works, or performances)? And how does theory interact with other fields, such as historical musicology, ethnomusicology, cognitive science, or philosophy? As you consider responses from influential scholars in the field, you will also develop your own, culminating in an independent research project.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be familiar with current trends in music-theoretical research and will be able to critically engage with debates in the field. You will be able to navigate scholarly journals and related resources, and you will have developed your research skills (selecting and evaluating scholarly sources, developing research questions, writing academic prose, and so on).

Materials

Readings and resources will be available via OWL.

Evaluation

This course will involve extensive reading, and I expect you to come to class ready to contribute to in-depth discussion. You will need to read carefully and to take detailed notes. Preparation will be

evaluated in two ways. First, you will periodically be asked to prepare brief in-class presentations. Second, I will often ask you to write three to five questions that respond to the assigned reading. You will share these questions on our OWL forum, no later than noon on the day before class.

Throughout the Fall term, you will create one or more “protocols.” You will sign up for the date(s) at our first meeting. A protocol is a written document, 2–4 pages long, that reflects on in-class discussion, with relevant quotes from the week’s readings and follow-up questions. Rather than a mere summary, it should provide a synthetic, critical overview of the issues at hand. Protocols are always due in the next class. You will bring hard copies of the protocol and read it aloud at the beginning of the class.

In the Fall term, you will write two short essays and a project proposal, which will identify a topic and some sources for your research project. You will complete this project independently during the Winter term, meeting with me as needed. Additionally, you will submit a draft for peer review during the Winter term and will provide a review for one of your classmates.

These elements will combine in your final grade as follows:

Preparation	10%	
Protocols	10%	
Essays	30%	(2 × 15%)
Project	50%	

Policies

Accommodations. If you require academic accommodations because of a disability, please let me know during the first week of classes. Accommodations may also be possible for students suffering from medical illness. You may consult the university’s policy on medical accommodations at www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

In order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing 10% or more of the student’s overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the office of the Associate Dean (Graduate Studies).

Attendance. Since this is a small, discussion-based class, your attendance and active participation are essential. Please let me know if you will be absent. Of course, with advance notice, you may be excused without penalty to observe a religious holy day or to participate an approved music faculty event (such as a concert or dress rehearsal).

Electronics. I will often use my laptop in class to refer to PDFs of readings and my notes, and you

may wish to do the same. That said, I expect you to use such devices in a respectful manner. Please silence devices during class time, and leave the room if you need to answer your cell phone, check Instagram, watch a hilarious cat video, and so on. Our time together is limited and valuable, so it is very important to minimize distractions.

Academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic offence, as found at www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf.

Mental health. Students that are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Their website is www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/, and their services are free and confidential.

Music 9521Y: Schedule

- Sept 12 *Introduction*
Babbitt, Milton. "The Structure and Function of Musical Theory." *College Music Symposium* 5 (1965): 49–60.
- Sept 19 *Theory vs. Analysis*
Cone, Edward T. "Beyond Analysis." *Perspectives of New Music* 6 (1967): 33–51.
Lewin, David. "Behind the Beyond: A Response to Edward T. Cone." *Perspectives of New Music* 7 (1969): 59–69.
Cone, Edward T. "Mr. Cone Replies." *Perspectives of New Music* 7 (1969): 70–72.
- Sept 26 *Analysis vs. Criticism*
Forte, Allen. "Schenker's Conception of Musical Structure." *Journal of Music Theory* 3 (1959): 1–30.
Kerman, Joseph. "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out." *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 311–31.
Agawu, Kofi. "How We Got Out of Analysis, and How to Get Back In Again." *Music Analysis* 23 (2004): 267–86.
- Oct 3 *Hermeneutics*
Kramer, Lawrence. "Haydn's Chaos, Schenker's Order; or Hermeneutics and Musical Analysis: Can They Mix?" *19th-Century Music* 16 (1992): 3–17.
Burnham, Scott. "The Criticism of Analysis and the Analysis of Criticism." *19th-Century Music* 16 (1992): 70–76.
Kramer, Lawrence. "Criticizing Criticism, Analyzing Analysis." *19th-Century Music* 16 (1992): 76–79.
- Oct 6 **Essay 1 due**
- Oct 9–13 **Fall Reading Week** [No class]
- Oct 17 *Music Theory and Feminism; or, Music-Theoretical Subjects*
McClary, Susan. "Getting Down Off the Beanstalk: The Presence of a Woman's Voice in Janika Vandervelde's *Genesis II*." In *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, 112–31. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
van den Toorn, Pieter. "Politics, Feminism, and Contemporary Music Theory." *The Journal of Musicology* 9 (1991): 275–99.
Solie, Ruth. "What Do Feminists Want? A Reply to Pieter van den Toorn." *The*

- Journal of Musicology* 9 (1991): 399–410.
 “Feminist Theory Essays.” *Music Theory Online* 23.2 (2017): <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.17.23.2/toc.23.2.html>
- Oct 24 *Works and Performances; or, Music-Theoretical Objects*
 Goehr, Lydia. “Being True to the Work.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 (1989): 55–67.
 Cook, Nicholas. “Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance.” *Music Theory Online* 7 (2001): <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.01.7.2/mto.01.7.2.cook.html>.
 Abbate, Carolyn. “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 505–36.
 “Performance and Analysis Today: New Horizons.” *Music Theory Online* 22.2 (2016): <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.16.22.2/toc.22.2.html>.
- Oct 31 [No class]
- Nov 2–5 **Society for Music Theory Conference, Arlington, VA**
- Nov 7 *Schema Theory/Corpus Study*
 Byros, Vasili. “Meyer’s Anvil: Revisiting the Schema Concept.” *Music Analysis* 31 (2012): 273–346.
 Huron, David. “On the Virtuous and the Vexatious in an Age of Big Data.” *Music Perception* 31 (2013): 4–9.
 Gjerdingen, Robert. “‘Historically Informed’ Corpus Studies.” *Music Perception* 31 (2014): 192–204.
- Nov 10 **Essay 2 due**
- Nov 14 *Rhythm and Timbre in Popular Music*
 Biamonte, Nicole. “Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music.” *Music Theory Online* (2014) 20.2: <http://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.2/mto.14.20.2.biamonte.html>.
 Cohn, Richard. “A Platonic Theory of Funky Rhythms.” *Music Theory Online* 22.2 (2016): <http://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.16.22.2/mto.16.22.2.cohn.html>.
 Scotto, Ciro. “The Structural Role of Distortion in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal.” *Music Theory Spectrum* 38 (2016): 178–99.
 Lavengood, Megan. “A New Approach to the Analysis of Timbre.” PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 2017. [excerpt]

- Nov 21 *Theorizing Music and Disability*
Straus, Joseph N. "Normalizing the Abnormal: Disability in Music and Music Theory." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59 (2006): 113–84.
Holmes, Jessica A. "Expert Listening beyond the Limits of Hearing: Music and Deafness." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 70 (2017): 171–220.
[This class will hopefully include a visit to the exhibition *Silence, Pressure, Noise* at Western's McIntosh Gallery.]
- Nov 28 [No class]
- Dec 5 *Project proposal presentations*
- Dec 15 **Project proposal due**
- Jan 9 *Individual project meetings*
- March 27 **Project draft due**
- April 3 **Peer review due**
- April 10 *Final project presentations*
- April 17 **Final project due**