Course Description

This course introduces a broad scope of contemporary music theories to both master and doctoral students in composition and ethnomusicology. In concept, the theoretical issues discussed during the class can be categorized into six different areas: history, pedagogy, analysis, interpretation, cognition, and perception. In practice, the analytical methods that we study throughout the semester examine and concern musical sounds from three different aspects—the horizontal dimension (pitch contour and voice leading), vertical dimension (harmony), and meaning/expression (musical semiotics). While contour and harmonic theories perceive a work from a structural perspective, musical semiotics perceives a work from cultural, social, philosophical, and aesthetic perspective. Furthermore, after gaining the knowledge of various methods, the student can further apply (or refine) his/her learned theories to analyze, simplify, and clarify the structural complexity in the music of other cultures, making it more accessible. Readings include scholarship that crosses the disciplinary boundaries among theory, history, and ethnomusicology.

Course Works

Besides gaining different analytical techniques, another important course goal is to help the student develop an insightful observation and critical view of a scholarly theoretical subject/research. Each of the theories introduced in this course contains its own potential strength and inherent weakness. While studying a theory, the student must (1) identify the strength that helps the listener to better understand a piece of music; and (2) point out the weakness that limits its practical use.

To develop this ability, I have divided the whole semester into 5 units. Besides Units I and V, in the end of each Unit II, III, & IV, the student is required to submit a short report paper (2-page, double space, font 12) that summarizes the corresponding topic, which outlines and evaluates the theories in terms of their advantages and disadvantages.

In addition to the short report, at the beginning of the semester the student must find a piece of “short music” as a test case, one that is suitable for the purpose of practicing different analytical skills based on the learned theories throughout the semester. The choice of composition can be a piece either from a contemporary Western Art music or from any world music. This training has two advantages. First, it helps the student to evaluate different theories based on the same topic. For instance, while discussing contour theory, s/he will apply several different methods to analyze the same piece of music, and use the results to compare the strengths and
weaknesses among the theories. Second, it allows the student to understand his/her selected composition from multiple perspectives (i.e., horizontal, vertical, and aesthetical).

Meanwhile, at the end of Units II, III, & IV, the student will present both report paper and the findings from his/her music analysis. The presentation should be no more than 15 minutes, with 10 minutes for questions. In addition to these 3 presentations, there is a final project for this seminar. The final project presentation is scheduled during the last week of class, and each student has 20 minutes to present. As for the written version of the final project, there should be 12 pages of text plus musical examples, graphs, figures, and references.

**Course Evaluations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Component</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Class Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>3 Report Papers and Analyses</td>
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<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4 Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Final Project</td>
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Weekly Schedule

— Unit I  Orientation to Music Theory —

Week 1 (1/28)
Self-conflicting natures: Prescriptive or descriptive? Theoretical or practical?
The nature & history of music theory/analysis

Readings


Week 2 (2/4)
Learning Music Theory
Theory Pedagogy

Readings


  Ch. 6, "Popular Music in the College Music Theory Class I: Meter and Rhythm, Melody and Scales," 213–65.

  Ch. 7, "Popular Music in the College Music Theory Class II: Harmony, Form, Texture, and Beyond," 266–322.


— Unit II  Horizontal Dimension: Contour Theory —

Week 3 (2/11)
Ethnomusicologists' views on the theory of pitch contour

Readings

Suggested Reading

• Week 4 (2/18)
Contemporary theorists' views on contour theory (1)
The origin of contour theory

Readings

Suggested Reading

**Week 5 (2/25)**
Contemporary theorists’ views on contour theory (II)
Extending contour theory to other musical parameters


**Week 6 (3/4)**
Short Contour Analysis and Report Paper Due/Presentation

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**Spring Break**
— Unit III  Vertical Dimension: Harmony —

**Week 7 (3/25)**
Does contemporary music carry on or challenge the tradition?
Harmonic quality: consonance versus dissonance

**Readings**

**Week 8 (4/1)**
Is it time to abandon the tradition?
Harmonic density: compact versus spatial

**Readings**

**Week 9 (4/8)**
Short harmonic analysis and report paper due/presentation
— Unit IV  Signs and Meaning: Musical Semiotics —

Week 10 (4/15)
Musical Semiotics: Its Origin & Application to Western Arts Music

Readings


Week 11 (4/22)
Musical Semiotics: An Approach to Perceiving World & Pop Music

Readings


Week 12 (4/29)
Short semiotic analysis and report paper due/presentation

— Unit V  Finale —

Week 13 (5/6)
Final Project Presentation

*** Final Project Due: 5/17/2013, 5:00pm EST ***