

Basic Music Theory MUSIC 073 (Fall 2025)

Tuesdays and Thursdays

10:05 – 10:55

Room 351

**“Persevere, do not only practice your art, but endeavor also to fathom its inner meanings;
it deserves this effort.”**

Beethoven, July 17, 1812; letter to Emilie M.

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Office hours: Fridays, 10:00-11:00 *and by appointment.*

class open forum address: 73@lists.ursatz.com

Supplies (bring with you to all classes)

Textbook:

Harmony and Voice Leading (4th Edition). Edward Aldwell & Carl Schachter.
(ISBN: 0-4951-8975-8). 3rd edition is also acceptable (ISBN: 0-1550-6242-5).

The textbook will be shown to the teacher in the second week of the class.

Other:

Music paper; pencil with eraser.

You may not use writing implements other than pencils.

Homework, quizzes, or exams done in anything except pencil will not be marked and will receive a failing grade.

Grading

The course will be graded in the following manner:

Homework assignments, quizzes, participation (see below): 50%

Midterm exam: 20%

Final exam: 30%

Participation: [see Attendance Policy, below]

As a matter of policy, I drop the lowest quiz *or* homework grade.

Final letter grades are assigned according to the following scale:

A+ = 97-100	A = 93-96	A- = 90-92	D+ = 67-69	D = 63-66	D- = 60-62
B+ = 87-89	B = 83-86	B- = 80-82	F = 0-59		
C+ = 77-79	C = 73-76	C- = 70-72			

Course material is presented in three forms: textbook readings, handouts/downloads, and lectures. You are responsible for all material, regardless of the medium of presentation. It is of utmost importance that you bring music paper to class and *take notes*. In the event that you are absent for a lecture, be sure to get the notes for that class from a classmate.

Please note that homework assignments will be posted on my website in the "courses" section. I do not accept late homework if the assignment is available to the student (e.g., via download), even if the student was absent when the assignment was given. Please see "Homework Policy," below, for additional information.

FAILURE TO APPEAR FOR YOUR MIDTERM or FINAL EXAMINATIONS WILL RESULT IN A FAILURE OF MUS 73 (regardless of your average).

ACSM Policy mandates that a final grade of **B- or better** is required in order to continue to the next course in the sequence.

Calculations

All written work is graded mathematically. The following is a partial list of errors to be on the listen for in written work; more severe infractions are in *italics*.

Incorrect notation

including, but not limited to:

Incorrect stemming
wrong note values
misplaced accidentals

Doubled 7th or leading tone

Use of chord not in directions

Parallel perfect 1, 5, 8

Contrapuntal ending

Not starting/ending on tonic

Incorrect diss leaps or

extended bass embellishment (e.g., trill)

Syntactic error (e.g., $V^7 - V$)

Harmonic syncopation

Non-resolution of diss

Incorrect resolution of diss

Voice overlap

Voice crossing

Incorrect spacing

Misspelling

Intrusive similar motion to a 5th or 8ve

Intrusive antiparallel 8ves

Adding to the figure

Missing note required by figures

Note out of range

Missing a voice

Unless otherwise specified, all chords *must* be labeled with Roman Numerals and figures in chorale work.

Material Covered / Course Objectives

MUS 73 is designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of music theory and to guide them to develop a mastery of this material. This material includes, but is not limited to: an understanding of fundamentals of notation, including the reading of clefs, and knowledge of rhythm, meter, and related concepts; the identifying and writing of: key signatures, intervals, triads, 7th chords, and scale degrees.

Quiz Policy

A student who is absent when any quiz is given must schedule a time to take an *equivalent* quiz within one week of the original quiz date. *It is the student's responsibility to arrange the make-up quiz.* Failure to take a quiz will result in a grade of "0" being entered for the quiz.

Participation / Attendance Policy

Class attendance is expected of all students.

Students are expected to show up to class on time. A 2-point reduction on the student's final grade will result for every 2 instances of tardiness.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to adhere to the college's academic integrity policies.
A copy of those policies may be found here:

<https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-resources/academic-integrity-policy/>

Americans with Disabilities Act

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Special Services Office, Kiely 171; (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of classes.

For more information about services available to Queens College students, contact:
Mirian Detres-Hickey, Ph.D., Special Services Office; 171 Kiely Hall; 718-997-5870 (8:00am to 5:00pm);
email: mirian.detresHickey@qc.cuny.edu

For exams, please note:

If you are entitled to special services accommodations, you must request them with their office ***at least one week prior to the exam.***

If they don't hear from you (and, subsequently, I don't hear from them), *you will have forfeited your accommodation for the exam* and will need to take it during the scheduled time.

In-Class Technology Policy

Students are expected to have cell phones, digital cameras, laptops, etc. put away during class time (though they may be kept on). During quizzes and exams, these devices are to be put away and *turned off*.

NO so-called "wearable" computers (e.g., Apple Watch™) are allowed to be used in the classroom.

Audio recordings of the class are permitted. Please inform the instructor if you are doing this.

NO videos may be taken during class. Videos taken in class will result in failure on all work for that day (first offence) or failure of the course (second offence).

Photographs of the material on the board may be taken *with the permission of the instructor*. This permission must be acquired for each instance. The taking of photographs without permission will result in failure on all work for that day (first offence) or failure of the course (second offence).

Email

Students are *strongly* encouraged to enter my email address and the class open forum address into their email address book and/or on their "safe list." Notifications from ISPs that legitimate emails sent from me or the class open forum have been tagged as spam will result in the removal of the student's address from the open forum list. This could result in missing important class announcements, for which I take no responsibility. STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO CHECK THEIR EMAIL REGULARLY.

Homework Policy

If the student is PRESENT when the assignment is due and fails to hand in the homework, it will NOT be accepted late.

If a student is ABSENT on the day the assignment is due, the student MAY hand in the assignment at the next class. If the student is absent at the next class, they must make arrangements to have the homework handed in (for example, give it to a friend to hand in; you may also scan it into a computer and send it, or make special arrangements with me).

Regardless of absence or presence, no homework will be accepted three or more class days after the due date.

THIS HOMEWORK POLICY WILL BE *STRICTLY* ADHERED TO.

SOME IMPORTANT DATES

NO CLASS:

Sep 23 (T) Rosh Hashanah
Oct 02 (Th) Yom Kippur
Oct 14 (T) Monday Schedule
Nov 27 (Th) Thanksgiving

LAST CLASS OF THE SEMESTER:

Dec 11 (Th)

MIDTERM EXAM:

Oct 16 (Th)

FINAL EXAM:

Dec 16-22 (exact date/time TBA)

THE POWER OF A ZERO

Many people don't realize the havoc a single zero can wreak on an average. Sure, they can figure out the basic math, but it still doesn't quite sink in what it all means. Let's have a look . . .

For simplicity, let's say we are looking at only one aspect of a grade (for example, your "homework" grade).

If you are given two homework assignments and you do a perfect job on the first one, but don't hand in the second one, your grade is cut in half:

from 100% (A+) to 50% (F).

Things don't get much better if you are given three assignments and you ace two, but don't hand in the third. The grade shift:

from 100% (A+) to 66.67% (D).

Indeed, to get that average back up to the "A" range, you would need:

9 *perfect* papers just to get a 90% (A-)

What do you need to get the full letter back?

28 *perfect* papers will get you to 96.55% (A+)

What do you need to statistically get the 100% average back?

198 *perfect* papers!!!!

And, Nota Bene, *all* of the papers to make up for the *single* zero need to be perfect (100%).

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

A FEW WORDS TO CONSIDER

HARRY NILSSON:

"Now I would like to spend a few minutes talking about song construction, which is one of the most important parts of song-writing....First of all, in construction, I might say that you have to get to know your song. You got to take it apart, put it back together again; keep it clean, because some day in combat it might save your life."

DAVID BOWIE:

"A discipline doesn't mean that you make sure that you have breakfast at eight o'clock in the morning and you are out of the house by half past eight. A discipline is...if you conceive some thing, then you decide whether or not it's worth following through, and if it's worth following through then you follow it through to its logical conclusion, and do it...to the best of your ability. That's a discipline, yes?"

JOHN PAUL JONES:

"I just keep listening...sometimes you can get...in composition, and playing to a certain extent, everything is really--at a basic level--about questions and answers. You have musical questions and you need to find the answers to them; This is especially true of composition, that's what it's all about. Things like, 'how does the piece start?' 'Then what happens?' 'Then what happens?' And so what you'll do is you'll get a musical idea, then you have to realize it. And in the realization it's just questions and answers. 'How does it finish?' 'What will make it interesting now that we've done this for a little while?' And, so, these...you can often find ways of looking....all music has the same questions and answers; it doesn't matter what type it is, it's still--whether it's Pygmy music, a Mongolian Nose flute--it's still, like, 'how do I present a musical idea? How do you have tension and release' and so on. It's all there. And you can very often hear how other people and other musics and other styles answer these same questions. And whilst you might not incorporate a salsa lick, you think, 'Ah! I like the way, you know, to raise the tension, they've just not used the root; they've just used the third.' Or, 'they've not played the downbeat.' And all this can come in useful as sort of reference material for your own questions, for your own music. And so I think it's VERY important to listen to everything that's out there. It's one thing I do tell young musicians is don't close your ears to music you don't know."

JIM NEGLIA, noted contractor (NJ Symphony, The Who, Jacksonville Symphony, Hugh Jackman, etc.):

"Some are curious how musicians get added to my 'hire' list. Generally speaking, I hear about other talented musicians from colleagues and conductor. Getting on my list by a solid reference is not the real challenge; staying on my list requires some doing, however. How does one remain on my hiring list? There is an easy answer to that question: don't be a jerk and impossible to work with; don't be needy; don't be unreasonable; don't make more work for me; be on time, smile, and as I like to say, play nice in the sandbox. That is the secret of getting and staying on my list."

In re CHARLES IVES:

"Moreover, having pursued the full implications of play, Charlie was urged by father 'not to stop when it got hard.' The permissive father displays a strong hand only in insisting that you know how to do it 'right' before you are permitted to do it 'wrong' and that, having been adventurous ('roam for fun'), you not retreat fearfully but 'stick it to the end.' He makes it clear that all this is in the service of something beyond play—namely, the musical idea: there had to be 'some sense behind it.' What the student sought did not have to be conventional or thought out at the outset ('maybe not very much or too good a sense, but something more than just thoughtless fooling'). Above all, he had not to accept rules blindly. The conditions for innovation were created by George for Charlie, an ideally responsive student. Permission, play, and perseverance were important elements."*

* from Stuart Feder's "Charles Ives: My Father's Song: A Psychoanalytic Biography." The quotes within are direct from Ives himself.

LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN:

"Persevere, do not only practice your art, but endeavor also to fathom its inner meanings; *it deserves this effort.*"*

* Beethoven wrote this in a July 17, 1812 letter to a little girl, Emilie M., in response to a fan letter she had written him.

W. A. MOZART (purported remark to *Don Giovanni* conductor, Jan Křtitel Kuchař):

"It is a mistake to think that the practice of my art has become easy to me. I assure you, dear friend, no one has given so much care to the study of composition as I. There is scarcely a famous master in music whose works I have not frequently and diligently studied."

AARON COPLAND:

"But whatever the professional musician may hold, most musical novices still search for specific words with which to pin down their musical reactions. That is why they always find Tchaikovsky easier to "understand" than Beethoven. In the first place, it is easier to pin a meaning-word on a Tchaikovsky piece than on a Beethoven one. Much easier. Moreover, with the Russian composer, every time you come back to a piece of his it almost always says the same thing to you, whereas with Beethoven it is often quite difficult to put your finger right on what he is saying. And any musician will tell you that that is why Beethoven is the greater composer. Because music which always says the same thing to you will necessarily soon become dull music, but music whose meaning is slightly different with each hearing has a greater chance of remaining alive."*

*This interesting quote is from a not-particularly-interesting book by Copland called, *What to Listen for in Music*. Tellingly, the book was written for *non*-musicians. In other words, Copland expected audiences to be active participants in the listening experience.

HARLAN ELLISON:

“As a writer of matters fantastic and as a critic of the field, I get a lot of mail, and they are filled with opinions. Everybody has opinions: I have them, you have them. And we are all told from the moment we open our eyes, that everyone is entitled to his or her opinion. Well, that’s horsepuckey, of course. We are not entitled to our opinions; we are entitled to our *informed* opinions. Without research, without background, without understanding, it’s nothing. It’s just bibble-babble.”

GUSTAV MAHLER (as told by Natalie Bauer-Lechner; see Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered*, pg. 11)

“[Mahler] was about eight years old when one day after the evening meal Emma, the seven-year-old daughter of the schoolmaster who lived with in the Mahlers’ house, sent the maid down with the order to ask G[ustav]. if he would tell her how to compose. Willingly and in complete earnest he explained that Emma should simply sit at the piano and play whatever came into her head. She should identify the main theme and write it down, transpose it a bit, elaborate and vary it until a complete piece had developed. The maid reported all this faithfully, and one or two evenings later she came running back. ‘I must come upstairs quickly: Emma had composed something but could not write it down.’ So G. dashed up to help as fast as he could, asked her to play him what she had worked out and jotted it down on paper (probably something had stuck in her head from one of her piano exercises or somewhere). That was the first and last time Emma composed anything. ‘But,’ said G., ‘it’s by that method which I gave her at the age of eight that most so-called composers proceed all their lives.’”

While my philosophy of teaching is rather complex, it can most easily be summarized by the following seven broad, interrelated topics: The Study of Music Must Encourage Musical Processes; Teach for Distance: Teach Via Principles and Examples, Not Via "Rules;" Avoid Issuing Fiats or Leaning on Rote Learning; Incorporate an Integration of Elements; Nurture Students by Encouraging Curiosity, Imagination, and Enthusiasm; Avoid Rigidity for Its Own Sake: The Teacher as Student; Engage All Students as Musicians, Future Audience Members, and Patrons

The Study of Music Must Encourage Musical Processes

Too often students in ear training and theory courses are left wondering what the connection is between their coursework and the music they are studying. I work hard to help students understand this connection. In a relaxed, supportive atmosphere, students learn to keep tempi steady, to keep going if they make a mistake, to work with others in ensemble-like situations, etc. The relation to their instrumental or vocal work is both obvious and important.

Teach for Distance: Teach Via Principles and Examples, Not Via "Rules"

Theory is, by its nature, a study of tendencies. Frequently, students are given ad-hoc lists of purported rules to follow in their exercises. It is pedagogically more fruitful—and musically more sound—not to teach these as independent rules, but as aspects of larger principles, thus placing them in their proper context and giving them their proper weight. Such a pedagogical approach has the added benefits of being more versatile and more readily comprehensible. Further, the careful study of the literature to illustrate concepts is important. This can be done at all stages of study and examples must be chosen carefully to render clear the concept(s) discussed.

While it is important to control the flow of information to students carefully so that they do not become confused or get ahead of themselves, it is important not to impart principles that will be contradicted or refuted by later information—what I call "teaching for distance." The knowledge should build one thing upon another.

Avoid Issuing Fiats or Leaning on Rote Learning

Students generally learn best when they understand the reasons behind the principles they are learning, and they should learn to question things judiciously. One must encourage students to come to conclusions about music, conclusions rooted in the musical investigations that form the substance of musical coursework. Even lessons which must be committed completely to memory, even if ultimately by rote, should not be presented just as a command ("learn these"), but rather as lessons which integrate their meaning into a larger picture.

Incorporate an Integration of Elements

The study of music involves widespread cross-pollination of creative ideas, technical and historical information, stylistic insights, etc. For example, through such simple means as asking a student in an ear training class that has been assigned a melody in E-flat Major which Beethoven Symphony is in that key, the students start to see the larger picture in their studies and to understand how things relate to each other. They become aware that they are required to know works that do not involve their instrument. And the idea that theory or sight singing or dictation is somehow separate from their personal musical experience becomes an increasingly absurd idea to them.

Nurture Students by Encouraging Curiosity, Imagination, and Enthusiasm

To bring out the best in students, one must create an atmosphere where students' enthusiasm is encouraged and lauded. The skillful use of one's curiosity and imagination is not merely a good learning practice; it is a musical practice. Students' performances and analyses should be governed by the controlled use of ear training, knowledge, imagination, and conceptualization; musical teaching should be geared towards increasing students' skills in these areas.

Avoid Rigidity for Its Own Sake: The Teacher as Student

Malleability in pedagogical approaches is essential. By this I do not mean that one should not have clear ideas or techniques to draw upon, or that one should not have firm beliefs, as should be obvious from the foregoing remarks. Rather, a teacher who cannot or will not continually look for new ways to explain things, for ways to clarify concepts, for ways to keep students engaged, is not executing the duties inherent in the position of a teacher.

Engage All Students as Musicians, Future Audience Members, and Patrons

The job of a teacher is to foster students' understanding, love, and appreciation for music. While one would like to think that all students will be engaged as performers and scholars, it is important to maintain the enthusiasms of those who will be pursuing alternative career paths. As no one has clairvoyance in these matters, one must regard all students first as musicians, but also as future audience members and patrons. If we do not encourage those who have expressed interest in the arts, whom do we expect to support those arts?