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Rachel Mann

Katrina Roush

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Concise Introduction to Tonal Harmony

by L. Poundie Burstein and Joseph N. Straus
Second edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2020. 528 pages.

The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis

by Jane Piper Clendinning and Elizabeth West Marvin
Fourth edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2020. 1,064 pages.

Reviewed by RACHEL MANN and KATRINA ROUSH



Introduction

The goal of *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis*, 4th edition, and *Concise Introduction to Tonal Harmony*, 2nd edition, is to provide a comprehensive introduction to tonal and post-tonal harmony and voice leading. Both texts are published by W. W. Norton & Company and are offered in print and e-book versions.¹ This online Total Access also connects readers to other digital resources, such as links to recordings, expanded musical examples (*Concise Introduction*), video tutorials, and adaptive quizzes in Norton's InQuizitive system. The *Concise Introduction* comes packaged with a print workbook, but notation files are also available online for students to complete using notation software. The *Musician's Guide* offers an accompanying workbook and anthology for purchase, as well as a complete aural-skills package consisting of separate sight-singing and ear-training volumes arranged in chapters matching the theory text. This review addresses mainly the print versions of the theory texts, only occasionally referencing the e-books or other accompanying materials.

Both *The Musician's Guide* and the *Concise Introduction* could be used successfully in advanced high school music theory classes or throughout the typical collegiate theory sequence. Both books contain music fundamentals, an introduction to species counterpoint, diatonic and chromatic harmony and voice leading with emphasis on SATB part writing, musical form, and post-tonal theory concepts. Both texts deliver content effectively through clarity of prose and the incorporation of clearly annotated musical examples that expose readers to strikingly diverse repertoire.

¹ All new print purchasers are offered free online e-book access for 1,080 days, that is, almost 3 years, which would encompass the duration of most undergraduate theory programs.

While both books are strong resources for most core sequences, they would not be the best choices for separate fundamentals courses due to the brevity of the content. Likewise, these books would not serve well as the sole textbook for a musical form or post-tonal course without heavy supplementation. Although more of these topics are covered in *The Musician's Guide*, it is not the goal of these texts to include the breadth of examples required for such specialized courses.

Accessibility

Both texts use clear language appropriate for college undergraduates or advanced high schoolers—simple enough to understand, while incorporating increasingly complex musical terminology. The level of detail and density in prose, however, is one of the main differences between the texts. *The Concise Introduction's* prose is simple and to-the-point without being bogged down by extra details or lengthy explanations. Its straightforwardness may appeal to students wishing to primarily focus on the necessary concepts for class. In contrast, the prose in *The Musician's Guide* includes more topical detail and context, which could appeal to students who possess a stronger overall curiosity about music theory and connections among various aspects of music study. For those using a textbook primarily as a reference for completing homework or memorizing definitions and guidelines for exams, searching through *The Musician's Guide* could take more time.

Visual presentation also affects the accessibility of textbooks for students. Both texts fill chapters with musical examples, breaking up prose in an effective way. Instead of tackling pages full of only text or only scores, students are greeted with an inviting balance of prose and music. Each book employs blue text, shading, or boxes to highlight headings, example numbers, and other features. New terms are set in bold, and scores are clearly annotated throughout. Such visual cues make finding new concepts or locating specific topics much easier.

One visual difference between the two texts is that the pages of the *Concise Introduction* feel slightly more crowded than those in *The Musician's Guide*. The latter has wider margins, indents blocks of text, and lightly annotates musical examples. This visual layout creates more blank space, helping the brain process everything on a page, and affords readers a place to write their own notes while studying. By contrast, the *Concise Introduction* packs more on a page, but the end result is a book of significantly fewer pages.

While it is crucial to consider students' needs when choosing a textbook, it is also

important for instructors to consider their own teaching styles, comfort levels, and preferences. Some instructors, especially non-specialists, may prefer using texts that provide detailed explanations of concepts, not only for their students, but also for their own review or study. *The Musician's Guide* is well suited to this need. Instructors who have created their own teaching materials and use a textbook only to supplement will find the *Concise Introduction* much more flexible. One of its strengths is that the short chapters can, to some extent, be reorganized or skipped to fit a different order of topics. While certainly not impossible, changing the order of topics is a bit more complicated with *The Musician's Guide*, because the chapters are longer and tend to combine several topics. Skipping or delaying a portion of a chapter makes chapter summaries, self-tests, and similar features less beneficial for students.

Textbooks should also be useful outside the bounds of a course. Many collegiate instructors may hope that music majors will keep their theory textbooks as references throughout their careers. Textbooks can help them prepare for graduate entrance exams or music education license exams. They can also be an invaluable resource for high school music teachers teaching an AP or IB theory course, or preparing a student for future collegiate music study. Both texts would work comparably well, with different strengths. The *Concise Introduction* provides a quick reference. It is generally easy to locate a chapter on a particular concept and to find a short description. However, if more context or explanation is desired or needed, *The Musician's Guide* would likely be a more appropriate choice.

One final characteristic pertaining to accessibility should not be overlooked: the size and weight of the physical books. *The Musician's Guide* is noticeably heavy and thick, having more than 1,000 pages, whereas the *Concise Introduction* is much lighter and unobtrusive. Instructors using *The Musician's Guide* may be met with resistance from students if they are additionally required to bring the accompanying workbook and anthology to class—some of the best assets of this package, in our opinion—to get the most out of these extensive materials.

The *Concise Introduction*, on the other hand, houses its supplemental material such as expanded scores and workbook templates in the e-book, replacing the need for a separate anthology or a physical workbook. Even some instructional content can only be accessed online, keeping the textbook smaller and more manageable, though for those concepts found exclusively in the e-book, a list of specific topics or keywords at the end of each chapter would be a welcome addition to future editions of the printed text. Students can also print out workbook assignment templates or complete them using the online Noteflight software. Before assuming this is the best option,

however, it is essential for instructors to determine whether students have equitable access to electronic devices and high-speed internet and whether they prefer students to submit assignments electronically or on paper. Furthermore, if instructors want to refer to expanded scores and other e-book-only materials in class, students would be required to bring tablets or laptops with them. Since the *Concise Introduction* relies heavily on the e-book for supplemental material, the three-year access period is not ideal for students preparing for graduate entrance exams or music education license exams near the end of their fourth or fifth years of study.

Topics

Both *The Musician's Guide* and the *Concise Introduction* offer an overview of music fundamentals and cover the principles of Roman numeral analysis and SATB part writing, diatonic and chromatic harmony, musical form, and common post-tonal concepts and techniques. The order of topics and depth of coverage sets these books apart. *The Musician's Guide* is divided into four large parts:

- I. Elements of Music
- II. Diatonic Harmony and Tonicization
- III. Chromatic Harmony and Form
- IV. The Twentieth Century and Beyond

The *Concise Introduction* covers much of the same material in six large parts:

- I. Fundamentals
- II. Overview of Harmony and Voice Leading
- III. Diatonic Harmony
- IV. Chromatic Harmony
- V. Form
- VI. Post-Tonal Theory

Each text ends with a variety of appendices containing answers to questions posed throughout each chapter (such as *The Musician's Guide's* "Try it" and *Concise Introduction's* "Test Yourself" questions), glossaries of key terms, music credits, and subject and musical example indexes. *The Musician's Guide* additionally includes a chart of the overtone series, guidelines for part writing, ranges (and transpositions) of orchestral instruments, and a set class list.

Both *The Musician's Guide* and the *Concise Introduction* begin with music fundamentals, though the approach to each is quite different. *The Musician's Guide* offers a thorough introduction to music fundamentals in ten chapters (about 200 pages), covering the usual concepts of pitch and pitch class, simple and compound meters, major and minor scales and keys (including diatonic modes and pentatonic scales), intervals, triads, and seventh chords. An introduction to two-voice tonal counterpoint concludes this unit, which includes rules and guidelines for writing counterpoint above and below in all five species. This section not only introduces the principles of harmony and voice leading in a measured way, but also leads naturally into the more advanced topics that follow. Part II, which begins with the phrase model, builds directly on contrapuntal principles such as the specific treatment of outer voices, embellishing tones, use of dissonance and perfect intervals, and how counterpoint relates to four-part voice leading.

By contrast, the fundamentals section of the *Concise Introduction* spans about 40 pages, and species counterpoint is not introduced until the end of Part II.² Because this is a “concise introduction,” many fundamentals topics are noticeably absent in the physical text, addressed instead in the accompanying e-book; a few topics are left out altogether. For example, C clefs and triplets are left to the e-book, but there is no mention of duplets. In addition, reliance on electronic resources can sometimes cause difficulty due to technological or formatting issues. The first edition of the *Concise Introduction* included the term “anacrusis,” but it is left out of the second edition. While it is defined in the glossary, the search function is currently disabled in the online tools, so this and other topics may be difficult to locate. The e-book additionally uses different fonts from the textbook for accidentals. For example, the inconsistent way the double flat is notated in the e-book (as two unconnected flats) versus the textbook (two connected flats as commonly notated on a staff) could cause confusion for students learning such notation for the first time.

Both texts integrate part writing in SATB and keyboard voicing throughout. While some music programs emphasize part writing, we know that others deemphasize it in favor of analysis. Because both part writing and analysis are treated equally, these books could be used for either approach. Instructors who wish to spend little or no time on part writing can easily skip those sections. However, those who do stress part writing will find that its integration with the other concepts in the books makes it less daunting for students. In both texts, the part-writing examples serve to introduce

² Unlike *The Musician's Guide*, the *Concise Introduction* only provides rules and guidelines for composing counterpoint *above* a given cantus firmus in three species.

ideas and concepts (i.e., *why* these rules exist) rather than presenting lists of rules seemingly detached from actual musical practice or analysis.

One notable difference between the two texts involves their choice of contextualized or functional analysis labels. While both texts use tonic (T) and dominant (D) labels for harmonic functions, the two books differ on labels for harmonies that progress to the dominant. *The Musician's Guide* calls these predominant (PD) chords, and the *Concise Introduction* labels them as subdominant (S) chords. Both texts employ these labels consistently throughout the diatonic harmony units, but they are fairly unobtrusive in musical examples and appear less frequently in later chromatic sections.

While expected topics for diatonic and chromatic harmony and voice leading are present in both texts, they differ in the order and density of topics covered. *The Musician's Guide* tends to group many large, related topics together into single chapters; the *Concise Introduction* separates these into smaller sections. Part II of *The Musician's Guide* introduces harmony and voice leading by grouping multiple topics into fairly long, comprehensive chapters. For example, in Chapter 12, students learn about the basic phrase model, cadence types, four-part writing (along with introductory rules and resolutions of V), harmonizing a melody, and writing accompaniments. In Part II of the *Concise Introduction*, Chapter 4 addresses four-part harmony and writing chords in SATB and keyboard styles, Chapter 5 introduces voice leading, and harmonic progression is addressed in Chapter 6, which additionally introduces cadences and melody harmonizations. Similarly, Chapter 13 of *The Musician's Guide* introduces dominant sevenths and their inversions, the predominant area, and figured bass realization, whereas the *Concise Introduction* separates these topics into six chapters.

While the concepts in each chapter of *The Musician's Guide* are related, and students ultimately need to learn how they fit together, this grouping can feel a bit overwhelming for a single chapter. Conversely, the approach taken by the *Concise Introduction* simplifies searching for and reading up on a given topic. Its separation of concepts minimizes the amount of new information to process. One notable concern about the *Concise Introduction's* economy of prose, however, is that it can sometimes lead to confusing explanations that could benefit from more information. For example, in Chapter 12, V_5^6 and V_2^4 chords are labeled as both T and D with little explanation (119–25); in Chapter 29, the $\flat VI$ is described as “a major triad whose root is the minor form of $\hat{6}$,” without explaining why flats are added to the Roman numerals (264). Because the examples provided show only chords whose roots have added flats and not naturals or double flats, it would be difficult to deduce that all such chords are labeled similarly. Likewise, in Chapter 31, readers learn that German augmented sixth

chords are sometimes spelled with a raised $\hat{2}$ instead of a minor $\hat{3}$ with no clarification, and both spellings are shown as “good” instances in Example 31.13 (278).

The texts also vary in their presentation of musical form, though between the two books there is beneficial application of recent *Formenlehre* labels, such as Caplin's basic idea and continuation (Caplin, 9–10) and Hepokoski and Darcy's medial caesura (Hepokoski and Darcy, 18). *The Musician's Guide* incorporates its musical form chapters throughout the text. For example, four-measure phrases and small forms appear in Part II, and larger forms are included in Part III after the introduction of modulation (Chapter 22). This section includes binary and ternary forms, inventions and fugues, variation form (including a brief overview of topic theory—a welcome addition to a comprehensive harmony and voice-leading textbook), and classical vocal forms. Part III also introduces the sonata, concerto, rondo, and sonata-rondo, as well as various popular song forms. The *Concise Introduction*, on the other hand, concentrates all its form chapters into Part V of the text, making it easy to skip around depending on curricular needs. Like *The Musician's Guide*, the *Concise Introduction* addresses small forms, binary and ternary forms, sonata, rondo, and sonata-rondo forms. While one-part, vocal, and variation forms are omitted from the printed text for the sake of brevity, these topics do appear in the e-book version, which is where the *Concise Introduction's* online materials shine. The printed text's form chapters include an unusually large number of examples notated as simple, single-line melodies to illustrate various formal concepts; however, the e-book expands each melody so users can see and hear how the form of each melody fits within the context of a larger thematic area, movement, or complete piece.

Post-tonal sections make up the final parts of each book. Part IV of *The Musician's Guide* contains chapters on modes and scales and early twentieth-century rhythm and meter, including the Fibonacci series and golden section. There are also chapters on set theory, serialism and twelve-tone theory, and post-1945 rhythm, meter, and form, covering such topics as moment form, metric modulations, indeterminacy and chance, and more recent trends such as minimalism, parody, (post)modernism, and microtonal tunings.

A notable contrast between the first and second editions of the *Concise Introduction* is the inclusion of eight new chapters on post-tonal theory. While integer notation is mentioned briefly on p. 390, it is systematically avoided throughout, leading to the application of non-traditional (and sometimes cumbersome) labels for common post-tonal concepts. For example, Part VI begins with scales and collections, where students are urged to label diatonic collections as $\text{DIA}_{3\sharp}$ or $\text{DIA}_{4\flat}$, with DIA representing diatonic

and $3\sharp$ or $4\flat$, representing the collections' traditional key signature. Yet, just a few pages later, "passages based on a diatonic collection or scale can be labeled in two ways: the collection and centric tone (2 \sharp collection on E) or the scale name (E Dorian)" (356). Pentatonic scales are likewise identified "by naming the lowest note in the 'major' interval ordering: 2-2-3-2-3, and, if possible, the centric tone" (359). Thus, students might be urged to label a pentatonic scale composed of A-C-D-E-G as PENT_c on A. Integer notation is similarly absent from whole-tone, octatonic, and hexatonic scale labels, so WT₁ or HEX_{2,3} become WTC \sharp or HEX_{D,E,b}, respectively. Like *The Musician's Guide*, the *Concise Introduction* also presents post-tonal set theory (but limits the treatment of sets to trichords) and twelve-tone serialism. The avoidance of integer notation is perhaps the most noticeable in the discussion of twelve-tone serialism. We feel that using integer notation would help these chapters achieve the same brevity and economy of text that is a highlight of the rest of the book.

The *Concise Introduction* offers a welcome chapter on triadic post-tonality, introducing the transformations P, L, R, and SLIDE and showing how transformations can map onto a *Tonnetz*. Readers are directed to the e-book to learn more about interval-class content, common tones under transposition, composing out, and hexachordal combinatoriality. The final chapter addresses post-tonal form, specifically how modern composers deal with traditional tonal forms such as periods, sentences, and sonatas, and additionally introduces moment form, collage form, and form as process.

Musical Examples

Both texts include an abundance of musical examples that illustrate concepts clearly and effectively. This encourages students to approach learning music theory through a multimodal process. Students read about a concept, see it within the context of a score, and hear how the concept sounds in this context. Theory texts with large numbers of musical examples also introduce students to a significant repertoire of musical works. Additionally, there are enough examples in both texts for instructors to use, reducing the need to find appropriate examples on their own.

Though musical examples are certainly central to both texts, they function in contrasting ways. *The Musician's Guide* tends to explain concepts in prose, and score excerpts from the literature demonstrate how such concepts work. Often, examples appear in the middle of an explanation in order to guide the reader to understanding through seeing and hearing a musical work. Examples are annotated to illustrate the topic at hand, while incorporating analytical concepts from previous chapters.

Annotations generally include various combinations of key labels, Roman numerals, figured bass, cadence types, functional analysis, and whatever else is relevant to the present chapter, while keeping the score clean and readable with space for further notes and annotations.

The *Concise Introduction* also introduces concepts first in prose, but its musical examples do not merely demonstrate the topics. Instead, heavily annotated scores encourage the learning of concepts through a deeper exploration of the examples themselves. The annotations, which usually include boxed text rather than just markings and labels, mimic how an instructor might walk students through an analysis in class. Additionally, part-writing examples often appear in pairs or groups, with at least one example labeled “good” and one labeled “poor.” “Poor” examples show errors or less desirable solutions with lucid reasons *why* some solutions are better than others; students are shown not only that certain examples work, but also why others do not. Addressing common errors while presenting a new topic can be an effective way of preventing students from making such mistakes themselves. Even more importantly, this approach can develop a deeper comprehension of concepts by building context around basic ideas.

The authors of both texts do an excellent job of exposing readers to a wide range of musical examples by composers from underrepresented groups. We agree with Ellie M. Hisama that diversifying the composers we introduce to our students “is critical to a transformative, intersectional, more inclusive music theory pedagogy” so that “we who teach music theory can aim to reach a more diverse student population” (Hisama, 262). The *Concise Introduction* includes over fifty different women composers and over fifty examples by BIPOC composers. *The Musician's Guide* includes at least one example by a woman in every chapter, and the number of women and BIPOC composers represented is significantly higher than that of previous editions. Expanding the canon to include more diverse composers is such a crucial and positive change for the field of music theory, and we are encouraged to see these authors committed to this ideal.

In addition to diversity of composers, it is important for students to be exposed to a variety of genres, styles, and instrumentations. The *Concise Introduction* includes many examples for instruments other than the piano. Most notably, it includes numerous examples for classical guitar, an instrument that is often neglected in theory texts, but is often played by a substantial number of students. Many of the examples in the physical textbook are truncated to show only enough music to illustrate the concept, but extended versions of the examples, both scores and recordings, can be accessed online in the e-book. The brevity and simplicity of examples is practical in

saving space—certainly one of the strengths of the *Concise Introduction*—and most examples in the book can be more or less easily demonstrated at a piano. Nevertheless, instructors should both encourage students to access the longer online examples on their own and work with them in class, so students see and hear the fuller context and discover a more expansive repertoire.

In contrast, *The Musician's Guide* includes slightly longer examples in the text, though the authors do encourage readers to adopt their supplemental anthology, which includes a variety of complete pieces. Examples in *The Musician's Guide* tend to use more varied instrumentation and open scoring, prompting students to practice reading multiple staves and clefs at once. Though we would like to see an even greater diversity of composers, styles, genres, and instrumentation in both texts, these new editions take a significant step toward more equal representation.

Of special note are the two entire chapters devoted to popular music in *The Musician's Guide*: one on jazz and blues, and one on more recent trends, including rap and hip-hop. Instead of simply inserting popular music to demonstrate a classical concept, these chapters discuss more appropriate analytical approaches for popular styles. Although only brief overviews, they introduce lead sheet symbols, guitar tablature, intensity graphs, phrase analysis, poetic devices in rap, and performance comparisons. The placement of these chapters at the end of Part III makes them easy enough to skip, although we absolutely encourage instructors to make time for them. Many students identify closely with popular music; these chapters demonstrate that all styles of music have value, but may benefit from alternative modes of analysis.

Conclusion

Both *The Musician's Guide to Theory and Analysis* and *Concise Introduction to Tonal Harmony* are strong textbooks that will successfully enhance music theory instruction. While each text has numerous benefits, the differences between the two prompt us to make certain recommendations based on the needs of specific instructors and students.

Because of its detailed explanations and numerous supplemental materials, we believe *The Musician's Guide* would especially benefit inexperienced theory teachers, non-specialists, or instructors with limited time and resources, such as contingent faculty and those with heavy course loads. Instructors can draw on what *The Musician's Guide* offers without heavy supplementation. Those needing to brush up on some concepts before teaching can find the information directly in the textbook and

ancillary materials. Because of the breadth of topics covered in such detail, this text could realistically work for an entire music theory sequence, including fundamentals, form, and post-tonal analysis, though we would recommend supplementation for these latter three topics.

In general, *The Musician's Guide* pushes conceptually deeper than the *Concise Introduction*, with more detailed explanations, a large number of examples, and bonus features to contextualize the main concepts. This level of detail will appeal to certain types of students, such as those especially curious about theory and analysis, and more advanced students who grasp basic concepts quickly. Similarly, the textbook works well as a resource beyond the bounds of a theory sequence for those who appreciate clear examples and thorough explanations of topics.

For experienced theory instructors who have already compiled their own supplementary materials, the *Concise Introduction* is an ideal textbook. Its flexibility and simplicity allow for its adaptation into a variety of curriculum structures and formats. Though its form and post-tonal sections are less comprehensive than those in *The Musician's Guide*, they still provide an effective introduction to these concepts and could fit into a curriculum chiefly focused on tonal harmony and part writing.

To us, the prose in the *Concise Introduction* reads like the notes we hope students take during our theory classes. The brevity and focus of this textbook will work well for students who prefer short reading assignments. As a reference text, the *Concise Introduction* provides easy-to-locate, clear definitions that are able to be gleaned without getting bogged down in too many details, making it suitable for a basic review or quick clarification of a particular concept. Many students will benefit from the guided walkthrough of the annotated examples. Inclusion of both “Good” and “Poor” examples anticipates and addresses common missteps, so students can expand their understanding of concepts and avoid such mistakes. The small book is practical for students to carry, although they can access nearly everything needed online. This effective use of technology creates more options for accessibility and sustainability.

We appreciate the variances between these textbooks because of the vast differences that exist among instructors, students, and the schools and programs within which they reside. By selecting either *The Musician's Guide* or the *Concise Introduction*, instructors can find what best fits the needs of their students without sacrificing quality pedagogy or exposure to a more diverse and equitable repertoire.

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