

1-1-2017

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# Embracing “the Teachable Moment”: Creative Warm-Ups, Pre-Teaching, and Their Role in the Music Theory Curriculum

AMY LYNNE ENGELSDORFER

One of the most common problems that music theory instructors seem to share is the lack of time to cover as many topics as they would like in a given class period. This lack can be from any number of causes, from theory coursework reinforcing related coursework such as keyboard skills and ear training, to acquainting students with foundational concepts of music theory and history, the technical, historical, and cultural foundations of our art.

While no single approach can remedy this problem of time, I have developed various activities that utilize small pockets of typically unused time, and engage students from the moment they enter the room. I call these techniques and activities “preteaching.” As I will demonstrate, preteaching activities not only set a positive and engaging tone for the class, but they can enhance the entire music curriculum. As a result, instruction is not only more efficient, it extends across areas of music study, developing the whole musician.



A common problem that music theory instructors seem to share is lack of time to cover as many topics as they would like in a given class period. There are a number of causes of this dilemma. One cause can be course scheduling; for example, theory courses at my institution now include substantial keyboard study to supplement keyboard classes, shortened as the result of block scheduling. Another cause is the ongoing effort to fill in gaps in student learning that can occur at various points in the sequence. Instructors are familiar with issues surrounding the divergent levels of prior knowledge in a first-semester course, for instance. However, other student deficiencies, such as ignorance of major musical styles or keyboard skills that are not as developed as they could be, may not make themselves known until later. This gap in their learning can make later theory topics more difficult for students to understand; consequently, teachers may have to address particular topics before they can proceed, leaving less time for guided practice and working one-on-one with individual students.

No single approach can remedy this problem. However, in this article I will describe several activities that make use of the time in which students are settling into their seats to address these gaps in student knowledge. It is important to note that these activities are distinct from homework, but may enhance the students’ ability to absorb that day’s lesson, to strengthen their foundation for accomplishing homework. Some activities are designed to remediate deficits, others plant seeds for development

later in the same class session, and still others lay the groundwork for future lessons. While I consider all of these activities to be creative warm-up activities, they also fall under a broader category of instruction that I call “pre-teaching.” In this context, pre-teaching denotes conscientiously designing activities that serve as foundations for future lessons. I will begin by first exploring the benefits of creative warm-up activities, and how the concept of pre-teaching informs them. I will then describe five sample warm-up activities that I have found to be particularly effective.

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### **Creative Warm-Up Exercises and Pre-Teaching**

Like athletes, musicians perform best after they have completed a warm-up routine of some sort. Not only does it create the physical conditions in which the most effective learning can take place, but the mind is also prepared for what lies ahead. Students tend to retain the information gleaned at the beginning of class more so than what happens in the middle or the end, and so the warm-up is particularly important.<sup>1</sup> On a class-to-class level, creative warm-ups set the stage for each day’s lesson. Educational psychologist Madeline Hunter calls activities such as these “anticipatory sets.”<sup>2</sup> Hunter explains that an anticipatory set is “an activity that brings mental focus (activates the neural programs necessary) to the upcoming learning activity. An anticipatory set may hook into and bring forward students’ past knowledge and experiences, which facilitates the acquisition of that day’s learning.”<sup>3</sup>

While activities may be particular to a particular day and lesson, concepts related to these activities are stored to varying degrees in long-term memory. New neural pathways form that allow students to access the information gained as part of a warm-up activity; additionally, research has shown that repetition, such as the kind that occurs through warm-up activities, increases the brain’s “storage strength.” Even if a student is not consciously aware of learning a new concept at the time, retrieval of that information is easier than learning it anew.<sup>4</sup> Pre-teaching, then, simply refers to that process of placing material in students’ memory so that it may be retrieved later and with less difficulty.

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1 Cummings and Daniel (2014, 88).

2 Hunter (2004, 55).

3 Ibid.

4 Bye (n.d), accessed 12 April, 2018. More information on the brain’s retrieval strength (the immediate accessibility of knowledge) and its relationship to storage strength can be found at the Bjork Learning and Forgetting Lab: <https://bjorklab.psych.ucla.edu>.

Pre-teaching activities also have a number of practical benefits, both inside and outside the theory curriculum. In addition to making students more conversant in the musical language in general (such as basic keyboard skills, chord and scale spelling, etc.), students are all put on a more even footing topically. For example, consider the topic of writing and aurally/visually recognizing modal scales. Ideally, instructors cover this topic at the beginning of the theory sequence, at least quickly, when it is first addressed in many theory textbooks.<sup>5</sup> If not, when the topic returns later during the transition from chromatic harmony to early-20th-century techniques, many students may have forgotten this topic entirely or need substantial review before proceeding.<sup>6</sup> Pre-teaching the modes allows me to move the students forward quickly and easily when the topic arrives in the sequence.

The other benefit of pre-teaching is its flexibility in addressing particular planning needs. Some activities can be used as a means of scaffolding for immediate application, while others may be used over longer periods of time.<sup>7</sup> Below I share five sample warm-up exercises that I use, and show how they lay the groundwork for further development. I have labelled some of them “self-contained” in that they do not necessarily have a direct bearing on the lesson of the day; ultimately, though, all of these activities are means to an end, even if that end occurs later in the students’ coursework. For instance, the first activity discussed, “composer of the day,” reinforces the students’ ability to connect music history and music theory, and

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5 For instance, Clendinning and Marvin (2016) initially cover the modes in chapter 5, as an expansion on the minor mode, and the concept is reinforced by workbook exercises for the chapter. The topic returns in chapter 34, “Modes, Scales, and Sets,” as the authors discuss the composers and music of the first decades of the 20th century. Similarly, Benward and Saker (2014) introduce modes in early chapters, but return later to the topic. Kevin Holm-Hudson (2016) does the same, and several colleagues, who generate their own course materials but do not use a textbook, anecdotally report that they cover modes early on but return to them later.

6 I have experienced this particular situation in my own courses. As a result, I have had to stop and teach the modes to students who should have already had this topic. Unfortunately, this means that in the past I have lost valuable time that could have been spent looking at more extensive literature examples.

7 In the simplest terms, scaffolding is the creation of sequential activities, one building on the next, that help students first learn concepts and then later use those concepts with increasing levels of sophistication and with less direct supervision. In a music theory context, for instance, we unconsciously create scaffolding when we teach the rules of voice leading. Teachers will often begin with two voices, showing students the right way to create each line without error, and then reinforce these rules through error detection. These scaffolds are then removed as students learn to write in two voices on their own without error, and carry rules over to four voices; they are able to use these concepts independently, without the teacher having to constantly watch over their shoulders.

exercises discussed later, like keyboard exercises, not only introduce concepts that will appear as part of the theory sequence (such as intervals and different types of chords), but enhance instruction in other music-related coursework, such as keyboard class and private piano instruction.

### ***1. Composer of the Day (self-contained)***

The 15 minutes before class formally begins can serve as a time for enrichment as students settle in and prepare for class. When students enter my classroom, they always see an opening Power Point slide that features a composer or performer who was born or died on that day. Almost without exception, there is either a birth or death date of a reasonably well-known composer or performer every day of the year. I include a picture of the composer or performer on the slide, dates of and locations of their births (and deaths as applicable), and a paragraph about their significance and major works. Additionally, representative works play on a continuous audio loop.

This small addition to the class, which takes no in-class time, has a number of benefits. First, it exposes students to a wide variety of composers and performers, which is crucial since students can have an extremely limited knowledge of them (even the traditional canonic composers). Second, the music playing exposes them to not only a wide variety of musical styles, but particularly to these canonical works which, again, many students may have not heard before. Finally, having music on as students enter the room creates an atmosphere of creativity and an association of music theory with the works they are listening to as they enter the room. As more classes pass by, students are often eager to see who the composer of the day is. While they may not remember each composer, this activity exposes students to a much wider field of composers and styles, and is a tremendous opportunity to expand their awareness of composers and performers outside the traditional canon. The students particularly benefit when works by the same composers can be used as musical examples as part of the class as well.

### ***2. The Golden Ticket***

Just as the composer of the day helps students become more familiar with composers and literature, the “golden ticket” helps students process information that they will work with further in the day’s lesson. As students enter the room, they pick up a golden ticket at the piano and begin working while I am working with small

groups of students at the keyboard. The ticket contains a short problem or activity, printed on goldenrod-colored paper, that is relevant to the day’s lesson. For example, preceding a lesson on mode mixture, students are asked to set up and resolve five deceptive cadences in major and minor keys, using both triadic V as well as V<sup>7</sup>. Since cadences were covered the previous semester (before summer vacation), this gives the students an additional opportunity to review the principles of part-writing associated with this particular cadence. It also sets the stage for chromatic third relationships, since the deceptive cadence from V to  $\flat$ VI in a major key can be associated with the principles of voice leading and resolution from the minor mode. Similarly, preceding a lesson on enharmonic modulation, where the German augmented sixth chord and the dominant seventh are reinterpreted enharmonically, I ask students to rewrite a Gr6 chord so that it looks like a V<sup>7</sup> chord and vice-versa. After formally introducing this topic, students are more able to understand the mental process that occurs with this harmonic phenomenon, and recognize that the information they put on paper represents the mental process by which a chord is reinterpreted.

While preparation of these activities can be time-consuming at first, they offer a number of benefits. Students are working from the moment they enter the room, so no time is wasted getting the class focused once the official start time arrives. Likewise, students can make good use of the time that might otherwise be spent talking or playing on their phones. The activity can serve a number of purposes: it can be a review of previously learned material, additional practice of current materials, or a segue into the day’s lesson and new materials. Finally, the allusion to Willy Wonka’s “golden ticket” is simply a lighthearted way to get students thinking – particularly helpful for classes that meet at 8 a.m.!

### ***3. Keyboard Warm-Ups***

The next pre-teaching activity, keyboard warm-ups, focuses less on orientation towards the day’s lesson and instead supports the student’s development of kinesthetic and aural skills. Depending upon the institution, music theory courses may be tasked with teaching some keyboard skills in addition to applied piano and piano classes; teaching these skills is especially important as students can arrive at college with a limited keyboard background.<sup>8</sup> I structure keyboard drills so that they coincide

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<sup>8</sup> At my institution, theory courses reinforce keyboard courses through emphasis on homophonic keyboard textures, while keyboard courses focus slightly more on independence of the hands. I have designed my activities so that they not only fulfill the need to gain basic piano instruction, but teach

with the specific materials we are working on in class. While I am teaching them rudimentary keyboard skills in the short-term, I am also pre-teaching a number of concepts, which I will explain below.

Each week on Monday I introduce a new drill or group of drills at the official start time of class; we practice the drill(s) each class period, and students receive a grade on the following Monday as they pass through a line. After the “quiz” on the previous week’s drill, a new one is introduced.

I teach first-year students keyboard drills starting the first day of classes. The first drill is simply octaves, which also teaches piano topography. Students line up at the low end of the keyboard. The first student plays all of the Cs at the keyboard, one after another, in a steady quarter-note rhythm. Then the next student in line does the same with all of the Ds, leaving a quarter rest at the end since there are only seven Ds. Each student takes a new pitch until we arrive back at C. We then proceed down the black keys. With a single activity, students have gained a tremendous amount of information. In addition to simply learning the locations of pitches at the keyboard, they learn the concepts of pitch class and octave equivalence. All students also call out the next pitch to be played, forcing them to think ahead as well as be active participants in the drill, even when they are not performing. We cycle through octaves twice in a class, once to name the black keys as sharps and once as flats, drilling enharmonic pitches, and for our students, a chance to learn “absolute note names,” where sharp notes take an “-ees” ending (e.g. fis, dis, etc.) and flat notes take an “-ess” ending (e.g. bes, des, etc.). A sample of this activity can be seen in Example 1, where the bottom staff represents where the students cue the next pitch name.

Any drill can be quickly adapted to suit the ability levels of different groups. For example, with an honors or advanced group, we will experiment with different rhythms while playing, and announce the white keys by enharmonic names (e.g. “bis” for B-sharp or “dis-is” for D-double-sharp).

After octaves, we move through all of the intervals at the keyboard. We begin with minor seconds and continue out to major sevenths in ascending and descending forms, focusing only on one cardinality each week in the early stages (e.g. major thirds ascending, major thirds descending, minor thirds ascending, minor thirds descending).<sup>9</sup> Not only do keyboard drills get students up and moving, but they

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essential concepts, which are reinforced in classwork. While students know at the outset that they are graded on keyboard drills, and as a formal part of the course, I do not begin working on keyboard until the official start time of the class.

<sup>9</sup> We use whichever black-key spelling is the easier and more intuitive. For instance, E-flat to F, a major

student 1 plays:

student 2 plays:

8<sup>vb</sup> loco

8<sup>va</sup>

all students speak: D E etc.

**Example 1**  
Hand-Over-Hand Drill, Octaves.

experience both kinesthetically and aurally what they will encounter soon enough when they study intervals in the course. Furthermore, drilling both ascending and descending intervals, especially as the intervals grow larger, provides additional challenges in spelling and playing skills. This pattern continues throughout the year, as we move through major and minor scales, five-finger patterns, and so on.<sup>10</sup>

Example 2 demonstrates two sample exercises. In the first, student 1 begins a drill on minor seconds, performing C to D<sup>b</sup>, and as before, students name the next pitch combination that will be played. In the second, a student performs descending minor

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second, is easier to spell and represents a common spelling in various scale forms, while D-sharp to E, a minor second, is easier to spell.

<sup>10</sup> While interval drills take relatively little time to complete, drills begin to take much more time after this preliminary stage. Therefore, I divide my 18- to 24-person classes into three groups about halfway through the first semester. The groups are formed by ability level, which they self-identify on a questionnaire on the first day of classes. Every student takes their “quiz” on their keyboard skills on Monday. That same day, group 1 students, those who self-identify as completely inexperienced with keyboard or very weak with their skills, are introduced to the next set of drills; this way, they have an entire week to practice them, having gone through them with me on Monday. On Wednesday, group 2 students rehearse the drill at the beginning of class. These students are a little more experienced and do not need quite as much direct instruction. Piano majors and very experienced pianists constitute group 3, and go through the drill with me at the keyboard on Friday, since they generally need little guidance and direct supervision. Students from prior groups may come to the keyboard as well to review. Breaking down the classes this way keeps the total amount of time working on keyboard skills to under 10 minutes. The template for each drill is included in their course packet, and students know they are expected to practice the drills on their own in addition to in class, so they are not penalized if they miss class on a quiz day, because they can simply continue on to the next drill.



thirds, and students again name the next pitch combination. Example 3 shows the order of pitches that are drilled, moving up the white keys and then down the black keys.

Student 1: Student 2:

All students speak: D to Es E to F *etc.*

Student 1: Student 2:

All students speak: Ahs to F Ges to Es *etc.*

### Example 2

Hand-Over-Hand Drill, Minor Seconds and Minor Thirds.

### Example 3

Order of Drill Pitches.

After beginning the year with octaves and simple interval drills, we complete the first year with a falling thirds drill, shown as Example 2. This drill both reinforces lessons already learned, such as the circle of fifths and thirds, since the order of the chords are the same as those key areas in the circle. It also reinforces the principles of voice leading, when students play it in four parts. Example 2a shows the complete

drill in a basic keyboard texture, while Example 2b shows the different variations in voicing. In this context, “closed” simply means a keyboard texture, while “3 open,” “5 open,” and “8 open” implies a four-voice texture where the soprano voice begins on  $\hat{3}$ ,  $\hat{5}$ , and  $\hat{8}$  respectively.

a) closed position

CM   am   FM   dm   B $\flat$ M   gm   E $\flat$ M   cm   A $\flat$ M   fm   D $\flat$ M   b $\flat$ m

F $\sharp$ M   d $\sharp$ m   BM   g $\sharp$ m   EM   c $\sharp$ m   AM   f $\sharp$ m   DM   bm   GM   em    $\overline{\text{CM}}$

NB: The student may adjust the octave in the bass voice at any time to make playing more comfortable.

b) 3 open

5 open

8 open

NB: The student may adjust the octave in the bass voice at any time to make playing more comfortable.

#### Example 4 Falling Thirds Drill.

In the second year, students begin with a basic phrase-model progression of I-IV-I $\frac{4}{4}$ -V $\frac{7}{4}$ -I. This drill is the starting point for the drill sequence for the semester; each drill builds on the previous one and coordinates fairly closely to topics covered in class.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Like the first year, I split my classes into three groups, based on self-reported ability level, and with the same Monday–Wednesday–Friday schedule. Each student plays a progression in only one key; I

After the basic progression of I-IV-I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>-V<sup>7</sup>-I in both major and minor modes, the minor iv chord is inserted into the major key progression as an example of mode mixture. Following a week's drill on i-ii<sup>o6</sup>-i<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>-V<sup>7</sup>-I, the Neapolitan sixth chord replaces ii<sup>o6</sup>. After drilling I-V<sub>3</sub><sup>4</sup>/V-I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>-V<sup>7</sup>-i in both modes,  $\hat{6}$  becomes  $\flat\hat{6}$ , leading to an easy transition into the family of augmented sixth chords. Students report anecdotally that these exercises help them by adding kinesthetic learning to aural and visual approaches. Furthermore, the need to play so many progressions fluently and with a minimal amount of time setting up the hands helped them as they prepared for their keyboard proficiency exams. Example 3 demonstrates the simplicity of moving from a secondary dominant in the progression to an augmented sixth chord in the progression.

The image shows two musical drills on a grand staff. The first drill consists of five measures: I (C major triad), V<sub>3/4</sub>/V (F# major triad), I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> (C major triad with 6th), V<sup>7</sup> (F# dominant seventh), and I (C major triad). A bracket under the I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> and V<sup>7</sup> chords is labeled 'V'. The second drill consists of five measures: I (C major triad), Fr<sup>6</sup> (Neapolitan sixth chord, F# major triad with 6th), I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> (C major triad with 6th), V<sup>7</sup> (F# dominant seventh), and I (C major triad). A bracket under the I<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> and V<sup>7</sup> chords is labeled 'V'.

**Example 5**  
Keyboard Drills at the Second-Year Level.

#### 4. Modes in Canon

The next pre-teaching activity, modes in canon, focuses more on aural rather than kinesthetic learning, and helps students appreciate the continuity of learning across their courses. Students generally are expected to have the major and three forms of the minor scale as part of their working vocabulary; not so with the modes.<sup>12</sup> As I have already demonstrated, many music theory texts present the modes during the chapters on major and minor scales as new configurations of half and whole steps, and then the topic is largely abandoned until chapters focusing on the close of the nineteenth century and the use of modes as a compositional tool. As a result, in their first year of study, students only gain a passing understanding of the modes, and

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pick the key randomly from a set of index cards. Group 1 students are responsible for key signatures containing 1-4 accidentals. Group 2 students are responsible for 1-5 accidentals, and group 3 students are responsible for 1-6 accidentals.

<sup>12</sup> At my institution, singing is a skill applied across almost all music department courses. In the written theory segment of the curriculum, singing is a teaching tool that we incorporate in a group setting. Singing scales and similar skills are developed in the ear training courses.

have to review quite a bit when the topic resurfaces. Thus, exposure to the modes as a concept, through the activity of singing modes in canon, helps students store this in long-term memory to facilitate later retrieval.

I use the modes as a warm-up singing exercise. At the first class of the year with first-year students, we sing through the major scale several times, using moveable-do solfege and Curwen hand signs. Once students are comfortable, I invite them to play a game: as soon as they discover the pattern I am singing, they should join in. I sing the pattern shown in the Appendix: each scale begins on do and adds one scale degree at a time: do-re-do (one count rest), do-re-mi-re-do (one count rest), and so on. After the octave, we add two degrees, high re and low ti. We sing just this much on the first day. At the next class meeting, we start with the additive game and sing as a single group. Then at the next class, I ask for five volunteers to be leaders. Each leader faces the class, and class members follow their leader. We sing the additive game again but in five-part canon. (See the Appendix for the complete canon.) We start with the Ionian mode since it is the one the students know. The following week we move through each of the modes, one mode per week, following this procedure of simply singing the scale, singing the additive form, and finally in canon. We move from the “brightest” modes through the “darkest” ones, including Locrian.

This exercise fills a number of needs and is particularly efficient. On the surface, simply singing as part of a group may be a new experience for some students. We can no longer assume all students have either sung in a school or church choir, so this activity helps those students learn to hold their own part while others are singing different parts nearby. It also helps forge a musical bond between students, as they listen to their voices intertwine and connect with others. This *esprit de corps* creates a positive environment and a sense of community in the class which only grows stronger as the semester progresses.

On a deeper level, neural pathways are being formed and we are setting the stage for future learning. Students are listening to themselves sing an individual modal scale repeatedly, so they are internalizing aurally and kinesthetically (through hand signs) what they will see in their textbooks about the modes. It is particularly rewarding for students when we begin study of the modes, and they are not only familiar with the unique sound of each mode, but can equate the written notation with ear and hand.

Group singing also allows the student to begin internalizing vertical harmony. In the Ionian exercise, for instance, students are introduced right away to the sounds of major and minor triads, as well as MM<sup>7</sup>, mm<sup>7</sup>, and half-diminished seventh chords, and even the M<sub>9</sub> chord. Instructors may or may not choose to point out these harmonies

by name, but in either case these chord types rapidly become a very natural part of the students' harmonic vocabulary. As we progress into the darker modes, such as Dorian, the students' harmonic vocabulary continues to expand as new sounds and harmonies are contextualized and become familiar to the ear. When these chord types are encountered in ear training, private lessons, and ensemble work, students understand how the harmonies "work" and how to tune them, how their chord tone fits into the texture, and so on. Even if the student is not thinking explicitly about the type of chord he or she hears, the student instinctually knows they have heard this structure before and how to interpret it in the musical moment. I return to singing the modes in canon at the beginning of the third semester, so that when the topic of modes returns, students can easily identify the mode in an excerpt of a piece by ear and consider it as a part of a composer's compositional language. It becomes a living, breathing element of a composer's music and style, not simply a particular configuration of whole and half steps.

### ***5. Melody Journal***

The previous four activities are examples where I set the parameters of what students should work on. In contrast, the melody journal depends on my prompts but also allows them to take charge of their own musical growth. It makes students accountable for working steadily over the course of the term rather than waiting for the end and possibly being overwhelmed by final projects. Furthermore, composition is somewhat analogous to formal writing. This journal gives them practice in melodic composition and a resource to return to for inspiration and ideas. Thus, I have observed that for many students, it seems to increase their confidence.

At my institution, Theory IV is a self-contained form and analysis course, the final project of which is composition of a sonata exposition, which students then perform or have performed by another player for the class. Students usually do not have much trouble finding the different parts of sonata form during analysis, and in many of the pieces we study, the four main components of the exposition – first theme, transition, second theme, and closing – are fairly easy to discern. When students start to write their own exposition, however, they are often intimidated by the process, even though their project could be as brief as 32 measures. Besides simple lack of experience writing this much music at a stretch, each of the four sections has a unique function, which requires different compositional materials. The primary and secondary themes generally contrast one another in mood and style as well as key area, and tend to

be periodic. Transitional material tends to begin in a similar fashion to the primary melody but ultimately modulates to the secondary key, and the closing theme is largely cadential. Students often have a difficult time creating melodies that fulfill each function and are also periodic. Again, pre-teaching activities are helpful in this situation, since establishing good melodic models ahead of time makes retrieval and activation of these skills easier when they are needed.

I therefore have students create and keep a melody journal in preparation for this project. Part of the effectiveness of the journal is that it allows them to experiment with this challenge in a low-pressure, ungraded way. Each day as students are entering the room and preparing for class, I have them write a melody that conforms to one of these four sections of a sonata-form exposition. One day I may ask students to write an 8-measure parallel period in some major key; the next I may ask them to write an 8-measure modulating period. Or I may ask them to write 8 measures that continues a particular melodic idea but does not venture far from tonic. As the semester progresses, I will ask them to write longer and longer melodies, such as three-phrase periods and double periods. Depending upon the type of melody I have asked them to write, I can assess them by simply looking briefly at their work at their seat and offering a few suggestions here and there, or I may have students stand behind me while I play their melody at the piano and critique. Furthermore, I have students create a “thematic index” for pieces in sonata form, where they copy primary and secondary themes from pieces we study into the journal, giving them further examples of good models to follow. Like any other musical skill, composition takes some practice on a consistent basis in order for the student to become both more polished in their work and more prolific in their ideas. The melody journal, therefore, serves as both a source for melodic ideas students can use later, and as a practice tool to help them come up with new melodic ideas quickly and easily.

Melody journals have several distinct advantages. First, when I introduce the composition project approximately two-thirds of the way through the semester, students are quick to react with panic at the thought of writing so much music; it is then that I ask them to pull out their melody journals and explain that we had been doing much of the groundwork for the project already. I can almost see the tension drain from their faces as we talk about how certain melodies will fulfill the different functions: parallel periods will serve as (or as models of) primary and secondary melodies, while the modulating periods will serve as (or as models of) transitions, etc. Once the student has all of these components in place, it is easier to put their ideas together and work to make all four components flow from one to the next. Second,

it prevents the “wandering melody” that never really goes anywhere when students are faced with composition of any substantial length. The only thing students tend to think about is making the composition “long enough,” not how one component flows to the next. The third advantage is that it may be used for nearly any genre or type of assignment. One also could have students keep a motivic journal, where motives are used in invention assignments, and where these motives are adapted and lengthened and turned into fugal subjects for later assignments.

As music theory classes do more and more for students, pre-teaching activities such as these can create more space for creativity and review in the classroom. This system is flexible in that activities sometimes take almost literally no time at all from class, such as the composer of the day PowerPoint slide. They can be used to effectively introduce and reinforce topics in a way that the student can process them easily, such as the golden ticket. Pre-teaching activities also can employ multiple modes of learning, such as keyboard warmup activities and modal scales in canon. Finally, there is temporal flexibility built into pre-teaching activities: they can last as long as a single class period, or can cover the range of an entire semester, such as the melody journal. In each case, activities are not simply “busy work” but encourage students to learn across the curriculum and in new and different ways. While the exercises described in this article offer specific suggestions for curricular development, I also encourage fellow educators to experiment with pre-teaching activities that serve the needs of their own courses.

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### Appendix: Modes in Canon

The musical score is written for five voices in 4/4 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 1-5) features five voices. Voice 1 begins with a measure rest followed by notes for 'do re do'. Voice 2 begins with a measure rest followed by notes for 'do re do'. Voice 3 begins with a measure rest followed by notes for 'do re do'. Voice 4 begins with a measure rest followed by notes for 'do re do'. Voice 5 begins with a measure rest followed by notes for 'do re do'. The second system (measures 6-10) features five voices. Voice 1 begins with notes for 'M F S F M R D'. Voice 2 begins with notes for 'D D R M F S F M R D'. Voice 3 begins with notes for 'M F M R D D R M F S F M R D'. Voice 4 begins with notes for 'D D R M F M R D D R M F S F M R D'. Voice 5 begins with notes for 'D R M R D D R M F M R D D R M F S F M R D'. Solfège syllables are placed below the notes in the first system, and letter syllables are placed below the notes in the second system.

12

1 S L T L S F M R D D R M F S L T D T L S F M R

2 D R M F S L T L S F M R D D R M F S L T D T L

3 M R D D R M F S L T L S F M R D D R M F S L

4 S L S F M R D D R M F S L T L S F M R D D R

5 D R M F S L S F M R D D R M F S L T L S F M R

18

1 D D R M F S L T D R D T L S F M R D T

2 S F M R D D R M F S L T D R D T L S F

3 T D T L S F M R D D R M F S L T D R D

4 M F S L T D T L S F M R D D R M F S L

5 D D R M F S L T D T L S F M R D D R

23

1  
D

2  
M R D T D

3  
T L S F M R D T D

4  
T D R D T L S F M R D T D

5  
M F S L T D R D T L S F M R D T D

Detailed description: This is a musical score for five voices, numbered 1 through 5. The score is written on five staves, each with a treble clef. The music consists of five measures. The first measure contains a whole note 'D' on the first staff. The second measure contains quarter notes 'M', 'R', 'D', and 'T' on the second staff. The third measure contains quarter notes 'T', 'L', 'S', 'F', 'M', 'R', 'D', and 'T' on the third staff. The fourth measure contains quarter notes 'T', 'D', 'R', 'D', 'T', 'L', 'S', 'F', 'M', 'R', 'D', and 'T' on the fourth staff. The fifth measure contains quarter notes 'M', 'F', 'S', 'L', 'T', 'D', 'R', 'D', 'T', 'L', 'S', 'F', 'M', 'R', 'D', and 'T' on the fifth staff. Each staff ends with a double bar line and a fermata over the final note. The lyrics are printed below each staff, aligned with the notes.