Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy

Volume 25 Article 7

1-1-2011

# Global Perspective on Music Theory Pedagogy - Thinking in Music

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What does it mean to think in music? To me it means lunchtime conversations about resolutions of chords, where we wave our fingers in the air, spacing them to indicate intervals; sometimes it means improvising a consequent phrase to an antecedent, or improvising a florid line to a cantus firmus; sometimes it's recognizing a motivic connection to an event that occurred hundreds of measures earlier. These are the types of things we would like our students to be able to do: to engage actively with the ideas in music and to look beneath its surface. However, I found recently that I was starting with ideas that were too deep and abstract, that I was working too much on music as it appears to the mind and not enough on more tangible, elementary craft. So lately I have changed the way I teach, and since mine is a sort of road-to-Damascus story, I have organized it around two conversations with younger colleagues that shook up my thoughts about teaching. Writing this article has been cathartic as I reconsider my own musical education—it's a mixture of polemic and reminiscence, part manifesto, part memoir.

I propose two goals: to get first-year students thinking fluently at about simple music before acquiring sophisticated and abstract analytical tools; this goal can be achieved through a variety of musical activities that must take place in the classroom. Secondly, I emphasize that lessons learned through particular cases are better remembered than those stated in abstract terms or using artificial and contrived exercises and materials. Therefore we have to set slightly different priorities, shifting the balance away from exercises and towards real music from the outset.

The goals are applicable both in elementary counterpoint and elementary harmony classes. Lately at McGill we eliminated modal counterpoint as the first semester of the core theory sequence, partly so that basic theory and basic aural skills would go together

[1] This is a much revised version of a talk I gave in 2009 at the Eastman School of Music and at the 2010 Annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory in Indianapolis. Thanks to Joel Wapnick, Julie Cumming, and Steven Laitz for their helpful suggestions.

better (briefly, you can't have kids doing modal exercises while learning major-key scale degrees). The new first-semester harmony is limited primarily to writing and analyzing in two parts, so that the students can actually manage to deal physically and aurally with the music. These changes are not important to my argument; for the purpose of getting people to think in music it doesn't matter whether you start with Renaissance counterpoint or common-practice harmony or pop or folk music.

## Part I: "A Lesson for Life"

> Once I asked a very smart, self-aware undergraduate composition major why students in an upper semester of the theory sequence don't seem to remember what they learned in the previous semester. Without hesitating she answered: "Well, that's because we're focused on the grade, and we don't know there's a lesson for life in there."

Perhaps you have had an experience like the one that provoked my question. Many students who learn some counterpoint before harmony, for instance, seem to forget the rules of voice-leading that they had lived with for a while. For thirty or so years I taught counterpoint before harmony in the belief that the rules of voice-leading are the same in both modal counterpoint and common-practice harmony, and that they will transfer. Year after year I was proved wrong, but never did anything about it. It may be that vertical sevenths are prepared and resolved the same way in music from before 1600 and after 1750, but even this apparently simple commonality is lost on the students. They don't know there's a lesson for life in there, perhaps because the surface of the music is so different.

So what would a lesson for life (LFL) be? LFL sounds like it should supply the most broadly applicable set of tools and attitudes towards working with music. As my colleague, Don McLean, said of the undergraduate curriculum, we aim to provide tools "for a lifetime of learning." If our ultimate goal in theory teaching at its most general is to look beneath the surface of the music, I can ask myself, what tools do my students need in order to accomplish this task? That is, what skills do I use every day in my own lifetime of learning?

We always begin our investigation of music at the surface. We take for granted in our own work that we can play, hear, and identify the basic features of a piece before we set off looking for deep-level structure based on abstractions and generalizations. But, let's admit it, our first-year students' grasp of the surface is not what it ought to be—they can't even begin to ask the questions to which we often start telling them the answers from the first week of classes. When I say surface, I mean things like knowing the scale degree of a melody note, knowing the sound of parallel fifths, hearing the vertical intervals in a two-part texture (whether in modal counterpoint, or conceived as chord factors in harmony), or recognizing that an Alberti bass is not a rapid succession of changes of chord inversion. Grasping the surface means really knowing what the music looks, sounds, and feels like; it means attending to many local events simultaneously, starting with simple intervals. Taking time to give first-year students a strong grip on the surface will pay off in later music theory classes.

I tried sporadically to get my students to come to grips with the surface. How many times over the years did I say "you must sing and play each example in the book, you must sing and play your homework"?[2] I knew for the most part they weren't doing it. The most obvious evidence in a counterpoint class was the melodic or vertical tritones or diminished fifths that appeared in species exercises. The offender, hearing the example played, blushed appropriately, because students do have ears and instincts. But often they don't get the LFL that the tritone is special among all those white notes.

OK, if their grasp of the surface is so lacking, what am I going to do about it? My solution is ultra-integrated theory/aural skills courses where ear training *is* theory.[3] The course embraces all types of musical interactions. If you want people to understand what "V4/2 of V" in b minor is, they must be able to recognize it on the page, recognize it when it is played, play it on the piano, sing it, write it, improvise it and resolve it. The only way to be sure

[2] *Modal Counterpoint, Renaissance Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; 2nd edition, 2008) , p. xii.

[3] For some reflections on thinking and hearing, see Michael Rogers' "Review of 'To *Doh* or Not To *Doh*: The Comparative Effectiveness of Sightsinging Syllable Systems,'" *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 14 (2000).

students engage in these activities is to do them in class, at least once a week, hoping they will do it outside of class as well.[4]

## *A maxim and some FAQs*

My first maxim is that the teacher is not to generalize about or mention even the simplest theoretical concept (e.g., $V^4_2$ of V, or invertible counterpoint at the octave) until the student can spot it, hear it, play it, sing it, write it, improvise it, and "use it in a sentence" (i.e., compose around it). These activities instill the concepts because all modes of perception are activated and integrated. Kate Covington, in her article promoting improvisation, quotes Piaget: "concepts are never truly assimilated … unless they have been reformed or rediscovered by some activity."[5]

## *When do these activities take place?*

I have split my modal counterpoint course into a "read-the-book-and-write-an-exercise-outside-of-class-for-a-grade" part, and a "sing-play-improvise-memorize-play'n'sing-and-take-dictation-in-class" part. I realize that if I value these various activities so much, they must be done *in the theory class*, where I can keep an eye on them. I don't think we can accept that aural skills as they relate to theory can be left to the aural skills course.[6] When musicianship is a separate course, it's possible for the aural skills teacher to drift away from the theory concepts, for the theory teacher to be less than supportive, etc. The integration is much more powerful if both written and aural skills are taught by the same person, and if the Aristotelian unities (of time, place, and action) are observed.

[4] I have little faith in assigning exercise like these outside of class, for the same reason that piano teachers sometimes prefer to give shorter lessons more frequently until the student knows how to practice.

[5] "Improvisation in the Aural Curriculum: An Imperative," *College Music Symposium* 37 (1997) p. 49.

[6] There are many skills that might be better taught apart from theory class, like beating time, tapping 2 against 3, reading C clefs, and taking rhythmic dictation.

### *What about the grade?*

Chris Hatch, years ago, suggested that not everything that takes place in the classroom need be geared toward the grade. That seemed unfair to me at the time—surely, I thought, everything can and should be graded; you can't ask the student to do something that won't be graded, since many students believe the grade is the "paycheck" for work performed. What changed my mind is the recognition that all the activities listed in the maxim are essential attributes of music theory, more essential than writing. Improvisation, for instance, is a "play-in-the-sandbox" exercise intended as a voyage of discovery. It's important to do it, but it shouldn't count heavily towards the grade. Even if it takes 100% of class time, it could count as "class participation" worth, say, 10-20% of the final mark. Just getting up and going to the piano and playing, for instance, a short CF and singing a florid line (invented on the spot or composed out of class) could be graded pass-fail. Meanwhile the rest of the class can write it down and critique it.

### *Play-in-the-sandbox?*

This tongue-in-cheek term refers to a serious activity in which we acknowledge that beginners must be allowed to make mistakes. The results are often horrendous, but that's the point, letting the student wrestle with the material (my TAs complained that some of the students were "eating the sand"). Dissonant downbeats, parallels, etc. are a small price to pay for giving the student a chance to feel around in the dark, and students should not be penalized for such mistakes at this more exploratory stage; the instructor can explain what was wrong but move right on to the next thing. Play-in-the-sandbox institutionalizes the process of discovery by making time for it under the teacher's supervision but without the pressure that results from being graded.

### *What about resistant or weak students?*

I have found that if these activities are begun on the first day, people tend to go along with them. If somebody is really scared, I offer them the opportunity to perform in the privacy of my office, but no one has taken me up on that offer in years. As for ill prepared students, the last time I taught modal counterpoint I had one or two who had never done this kind of thing (and some of them were

very weak in basic skills to boot), but they began by preparing to sing and play their homework outside of class—they weren't badly prepared for long, and ended up improvising competently in class.

### *Isn't that a waste of class time?*

Well, It doesn't take that much time; if each student is at the piano for three minutes with a half minute lost in the commute, you can get through ten students in thirty-five minutes, so for a theory class of twenty that meets three times a week for an hour you can get them all at the piano each week, leaving over an hour for explaining the assignment, dictating or singing, telling stories about Nadia Boulanger, etc.

### *But how can you cover all the material?*

This *is* the material! The teacher here is a facilitator, getting students to perform the tasks listed in the maxim, and to comment on each other's work. The teacher can contribute comments in a casual ("no, it won't be on the exam") way, e.g., "Did you notice that your counterpoint has the same intervals as the CF but inverted?" Such comments show, without insisting, that interesting insights can be made about things that are simple on the surface, and that such apparently simple things might contain complexity and depth. These hints anticipate things to come in more advanced theory classes, and some students respond well to the light touch. The material that is graded is mostly reading and writing outside of class. (Students *will* read, if the explanation of the exercise that the grade depends on is in the reading!)

### *Why do you keep harping on "sing'n'play"?*

Because this is the single best exercise for grasping a musical idea, for hearing and thinking in music's two dimensions. Sing'n'play in two voices is superior to just playing at the keyboard because one *can* play two voices as a series of verticalities, and thus miss out on the sense of either part as a line. Singing makes it easier to hear the sung line as a melody, having an independent continuity. For the rest of the class, the distinct timbres make it easier to write down what is played'n'sung. In species counterpoint, given that the faster-moving line inevitably grabs our attention and has more melodic-ness, it is especially good to sing the slower-moving

line; that way the competition between the two melodies is more balanced. In addition, sing'n'play forces the singer'n'player to attend to both vertical and melodic intervals: "I was on a unison with the piano, I went up a step, the bass dropped a fourth, now this should feel like a fifth" is good internal monologue for a young musician. Nadia Boulanger made us sing and play a lot (she used to say that the best way to experience four-part voice leading was to sing one line, and, at the organ, play the other three lines on two different manuals and the pedals). I still tremble at the memory of her saying "Schoubert, come at ze piano," so now I always put on a French accent when I call on my students.

## Part II: Style

> I asked one of our grad students how he liked being a teaching assistant in first-semester modal counterpoint and second-semester basic harmony (the old McGill way), and he said, somewhat dubiously "It's OK, but they don't look at any real music until the last few weeks of the term." At Harvard, he told me, John Stewart began his first-semester course by sitting the students down in front of a Bach chorale and chipping away at it until by the end of the term they could play it from memory in any key, analyze other chorales, and compose their own chorale settings.

If the students in my young colleague's story didn't see any real music, what did they see? They saw exercises and simplified paradigms. When I think of successful exercises, I think of some tennis lessons I took at Mont Tremblant. One fun exercise was the "approach shot," where you hit the ball deep, run up to the net, plant your feet, and slam the volley. The tennis pro took care in returning my deep, supposedly powerful shot, so that it was weak and accessible to me at the net. The cooperation of the teacher was essential to the success that made this so much fun. The problem with mastering any one thing like that is it never occurs quite that simply or conveniently in real life. And if the approach shot was *all* I knew how to do – well, nobody would want to play with me!

Likewise the theory teacher, wanting the student to succeed, assigns a task that is within the student's reach (usually in some step-

by-step pedagogical program), and that can be easily evaluated. The grade is the measure of how well the student responds to a very narrow set of options. That is, the teacher has to hit the ball gently back to where the student can volley it. This sounds good on the face of it, but it leaves the student with the impression that music theory is mainly about the contrived exercises. The difference between tennis and music theory is that after the tennis lesson you can have a friendly match in which you muddle through all the other parts of the game the best you can; if you manage one or two approach shots it's a triumph, even if you lose the point.

The tennis match has a satisfying wholeness and a natural excitement that no drill can have. Because in theory class there's no equivalent of a friendly match to muddle through afterwards, the consequences of focusing on exercises in music theory class are very dangerous.[7] I know, you'll say we all bring examples of real music into class, but these are mostly short excerpts, only occasionally a whole piece in a first-year class. That's like showing a video of a brilliant approach shot by Roger Federer: it remains a sound bite, a bleeding chunk, and the student can see it for what it is: a pathetic justification for the exercise. Saying "see, this happens in Mozart" makes Mozart the servant of the simplified exercise. The exercise, remember, is the thing the grade is based on! You don't have to win a game, you just have to master the approach shot!

Typical music theory exercises, for well-intentioned reasons, deliberately leave out many musical features. In both species counterpoint and harmony, we leave out rhythmic variety (often even rhythm itself), motivic repetition, phrases, rests, texture, register shifts, and cadences. These things are all indispensable to music, but more importantly, taken together they define style. One reason we leave them out may be efficiency: we want to show what is common to a lot of pieces in many styles. The whole point of paradigms and reductions is that they are elaborated differently in different repertoires. Knowing that many different styles have underlying similarities is probably a good goal in upper-level courses, but we mustn't forget that for beginners, style is what makes music intelligible. The beginning student who falls in love with a piece falls in love with the surface, but starting on day one we

[7] The only parallel I can think of to a tennis match is for the student to go out and compose a whole piece even though she has only learned to prolong the tonic; that would involve some serious muddling through; it might be fun for the student but I have found it is impossible to grade.

begin a profound investigation of its skeleton. (Imagine if it were a *person* that the student fell in love with, and we said "yes, but think about your beloved's skeleton first; see, it's like so many others"!)

Style is essential because it has a natural wholeness. We acknowledge as much when we label periods and herd composers into them. It's a set of common attributes gathered together for myriad historical and technical reasons. It's a bunch of furniture we can get used to living in, predictable and comfortable. Teaching theory through style modeling and analysis makes it easier to develop intuitions—even in the dark we won't trip over the sofa. Students have some sense of style and expectations that we can build on. At first we will develop these intuitions only in one style, but gradually connections will be made to other styles. There's plenty of time later to realize that sevenths resolve down by step in Brahms too, and that they don't always in Monteverdi.

Let's look at some artificial (non-style based) exercises that have been used. In around 1965 Patricia Carpenter institutionalized Peter Westergaard's "abstract" species counterpoint as the first semester of the theory sequence at Columbia precisely because she wanted the students to come to grips with music as strange, recalcitrant material. She likened it to wood, whose grain must be taken into account by the sculptor. She complained that many students think music is "how they feel," and she wanted to shock them with its otherness. I now think that such a context-free, a-stylistic approach is only a good idea if there's something firm in the student to resist that otherness; neither my students' grasp of the surface of any piece nor their comfort level with any style is sufficiently solid to withstand the friction of an unsettling concept, and so the artificial, abstract exercise comes to the fore.

The urge to systematize, to provide step-by-step instruction has been a powerful force at least since Fux, and introducing a little species before moving to harmony has become a popular pedagogical gambit in North American classrooms.[8] This reflects the notion that species rules (dissonance is passing, etc.) somehow "apply" in many styles. As I have said, I don't believe the transition from counterpoint to harmony gets made very well, because two-part species counterpoint doesn't sound, on the surface, anything

[8] This was cogently argued by John Rothgeb, who proposed a curriculum in which one begins with strict counterpoint, where what you see is what you get, and then moving to figured bass, and finally to melody harmonization. "Schenkerian Theory: Its Implications for the Undergraduate Curriculum," *Music Theory Spectrum* 3 (1981): 142-149.

like a Bach chorale, or indeed like any music on the planet. No matter if you say "look here, see the connection?" students don't have the skill in abstraction to make it from one to the other. If they're worried about the grade, they'll focus on their exercises and never see the connection to any music. I was taught this way— I loved my tiny perfect Jeppesonian ships in bottles (containing a single climax, no motive, and just the right number of changes of direction), but being told there was a connection to real music didn't make it so. My delightful little miniatures didn't begin to help me write or analyze music of any kind. The craft of species is an intense process, but can you remember even one of your solutions?

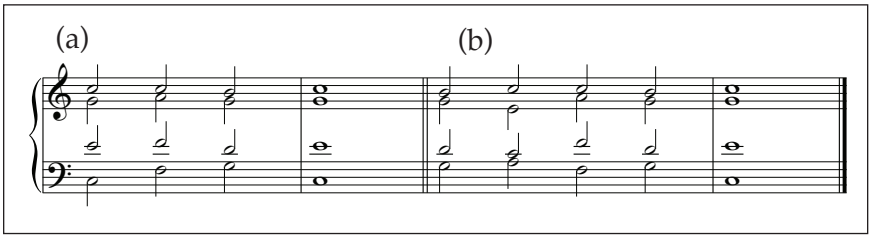
Nadia Boulanger had her students memorize model chord progressions (two are shown in Ex. 1). I do not deny that playing these in any key, singing the melodies of the four parts *seriatim* canonically, singing and playing any pair of voices, were invaluable to my musicianship, but these progressions are not music. They most closely approach hymns, but they have even less rhythmic and motivic identity.[9] These progressions are all disembodied approach shots. You can come away from them with a good ear and a profound respect for subtle and elegant voice leading (I am still deeply fond of the overlapping alto and tenor motions in Ex. 1b), but you couldn't begin to compose music, even a hymn, if this were all you knew. In Paris we also did figured basses from the Dubois harmony book.[10] Once again, realizing progressions in half notes (what IS it about half notes?), we pasted one solution over another week after week. I learned that subtle rhythmic inflections, particularly breaking up a long note to give rhythmic impetus and independence to a part, made part-writing come to life. Jacques-Louis Monod, however, derided these exercises as training for "a harpsichordist at a desk."

Boulanger once looked at a figured bass realization of mine and didn't like the melody; pointing to at the soprano part she asked, "what note do you want to hear here?" I bristled at the idea that she could possibly know what *I* might want to hear next, as if there were

[9] I was always troubled by the initial weak tonic in Ex. 1a – is this phrase the end of some longer hidden phrase? is it an end-accented Riemannian phrase? and why does Ex. 1b begin on the dominant? Schematic examples such as these are among the types of thing I refer to loosely as "paradigms" and "reductions."

[10] Théodore Dubois, *Traité d'Harmonie Théorique et Pratique*, Paris : Heugel, 1921.

only one possible right answer that I seemed not to have wanted. She took the next soprano note to be a sort of universal truth. If she had explained that we were playing in a Mozart-style sandbox, I would have understood that she meant "What would Mozart do?" and I would perhaps have listened to more Mozart and absorbed his idea of the next note.




Example 1. Two of Boulanger's progressions.

It's not just that exercises prepare the student only for other exercises, it's bad for the teacher too, to love these simulacra of music. One of the most insidious effects of my half-note exercise brainwashing is that, when I am preparing a figured bass as an exercise for my class, I become the clever composer of such nonsense. Who's supposed to getting their creative juices flowing, me, or my students? This pernicious inversion comes about because we don't trust our students to have any useful musical ideas of their own. Michael Beckerman, writing in *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, stresses the importance of the student's personal contribution: "It is my belief that students at just about any level are most excited when they are invited into the enterprise and encouraged to make contributions to understanding based on what they already know and the way they personally construct the axis of knowledge and belief."[11] (This is a persuasive rationale for improvisation in a familiar style.)

The best way to engage them is to put them in active contact with real music. They are given something from the real world to work with that is musically complete as far as it goes. It is not a chord progression floating in space or a melodic line that has no rhythm, it is a specific musical idea borrowed from a specific musical thinker with, we hope, specific demands and probable consequences in a

[11] Michael Beckerman, "How Can You Teach What You Don't Know? … and Other Tales from Music History Pedagogy," *Vitalizing Music History Teaching*, edited by James R. Briscoe (Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2010, p. 18.

specific style. It has rhythmic momentum, an organic continuation, the possibility of repetition, and is likely to be memorable.

I take my cue from the lessons Mozart gave the daughter of the Duc de Guines in 1778. He writes to his father:

> She has a great deal of talent, even genius, and in particular a marvelous memory, so that she can play all her pieces, actually about two hundred, by heart. She is, however, extremely doubtful as to whether she has any talent for composition, especially as regards invention or ideas. . . . I gave her her fourth lesson today and, so far as the rules of composition and harmony are concerned, I am fairly well satisfied with her. She filled in quite a good bass for the first minuet, the melody of which I had given her, and she has already begun to write in three parts. But she very soon gets bored . . . Everything has to be done by rule. She has no ideas whatever—nothing comes. . . . So I wrote down four bars of a minuet and said to her: "See what an ass I am! I have begun a minuet and cannot even finish the melody. Please be so kind as to finish it for me." She was positive she couldn't, but at last with great difficulty—something came, and indeed I was only too glad to see something for once.[12]

This vignette is entertaining and inspiring. Mozart's emphasis on musical ideas underscores the importance of thinking in music. He contrasts that with "rules of composition and harmony," and I am as depressed as he is about the prospect of doing everything "by rule." So I have adapted the "See what an ass I am" method in the following way for my first-year harmony class: a 2-bar basic idea is proposed (from a composition or invented by a student) and another student is to improvise the next two bars. The rest of the class writes it down and critiques it.[13] As the class progresses, a bass line is improvised to the four bars, and soon another four bars are improvised leading to some chosen scale degree, and then a

[12] *Mozart's letters: An Illustrated Selection*, translated by Emily Anderson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1938; illustrated edition, 1990), p. 91.

[13] Improvising sentences and periods is good preparation for advanced study of formal functions as described by William Caplin in *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

bass is added to the last four bars. All that, and much discussion, is generated from a bit of "real music." A textbook that has exercises such as these is Nicholas Cook's *Analysis Through Composition.*[14] In his introduction he describes various composing and arranging exercises, and adds: "It also involves writing some analyses. But the idea is to keep the analysis linked as closely as possible to the music. It is to my mind a mistake to introduce abstract music-analytical concepts at too early a stage in the educational process…"[15] His book focuses on activities in a single style.[16]

Personally, if I have to keep a class' eyes and ears fixed on a single piece for a semester, I wouldn't use a Bach chorale as Stewart did, but that's not the point. What's valuable about his method is that *some* piece is always in the foreground, in all its complexity and richness, with all its confusion and associations. Any general feature is always there in its natural context.

Exercises such as those that Cook and I propose are more natural, for they employ a fragment of a real piece as a model. We could write a variation on it in a different meter à la Niedt,[17] or compose a new piece using the same theme or structure, or improvise a different continuation to the first two-bar basic idea, or play the theme sequentially.[18] These latter interactions are thinking in music.

[14] Nicholas Cook, *Analysis Through Composition: Principles of the Classical Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.)

[15] Cook, vii. One problem with this book is that is that while it integrates "harmony, counterpoint, composition, analysis, and theory," it does not emphasize playing and singing and taking dictation as much as I would like.

[16] Like *Baroque Counterpoint* by Peter Schubert and Christoph Neidhöfer (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), Cook adduces ideas from theorists contemporaneous with the music (Koch, Kirnberger). Another problem with it for my purpose in this article is that it presupposes the reader's knowledge of harmony.

[17] Joel Lester summarizes Niedt's approach to "the path from learning thoroughbass to composing" in *Compositional Theory in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 66-68.

[18] Théodore Dubois ends his harmony book with partimento and variations on a harmonic progression (See Robert Gjerdingen, "Partimento, Que Me Veux-Tu?" *Journal of Music Theory* 52 (2009):85-135. Boulanger had her students play modulating sequences for long periods, exhorting them, at 9 AM, with "If you could do this until noon, you would be a saint!"

As Berio wrote, "I have always thought that the best possible commentary on a symphony is another symphony, and I reckon that the third part of my *Sinfonia* is the best and deepest analysis that I could have hoped to make of the Scherzo from Mahler's Second Symphony."[19]

### *Another maxim and some more FAQs.*

The second maxim is that nothing other than real music should appear in class. By real music I mean pieces or parts of pieces composed or improvised by students or from famous composers. By parts of pieces I mean a melodic idea, a bass line to which a melody is to be added (or vice-versa), etc.

### *Don't you teach species? How is that real music?*

I include on-the-spot-improvisation in my definition of real music, and in my class species is improvised as it was around 1550. I imagine the rules of dissonance treatment were taught very fast and immediately tried out. The examples from treatises that I have seen would never pass muster for Jeppesen or his followers, who insist on an anachronistic standard of beauty and wholeness. I stress only *survival* when urging my students to forge ahead against a 36-note liturgical chant; their lines might make as little sense to them as the CF probably does, but it will be correct by my minimal standards. This means that in 7-8 weeks they can be writing or improvising florid counterpoint with a motive, and that's real music.

### *But what models of that can you use?*

I admit that two-part repertoire examples of florid motivic counterpoint against a CF are rare, probably because any kid could improvise one. Several are reprinted in my *Modal Counterpoint, Renaissance Style*.[20] The Ortiz ricercar numbered Ex. 9-15 (on the famous CF "La Spagna") is a beautiful and complex piece, whose motivic repetition at the end I find particularly poignant.[21]

[19] Luciano Berio, *Remembering the Future*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 40.

[20] New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 2008.

[21] Many more examples can be found in organ literature by Scheidt or Cabezon, among others.

### *What can replace paradigmatic progressions?*

The original musical things they were abstracted from. In my harmony class a great deal of material comes from the ubiquitous "Easy Classics to Moderns" series; it includes many minuets from the Notebooks for Nannerl Mozart and Anna Magdalena Bach, Corelli sonatas, and some cheesy late 19th-c. items like "Love's Old Sweet Song."

### *What improvisation do you do in harmony class?*

The "See what an ass I am" exercises (described above), continuing a sequence, and improvising over a ground bass.[22]

### *What do you do for homework?*

Only style modeling exercises, analyses, and some memorization of pieces. These must begin with actual materials in the style, a liturgical CF, a stolen soggetto, a little theme from a minuet, etc. The ultimate goal of this type of course (whether counterpoint or harmony) is model composition. Thinking in music, like thinking in words, is often best expressed in writing, which can be planned and revised. The activities proposed here are meant to make writing more natural and comfortable, like slowed-down improvisation. We have had students write two-part Renaissance duos à la Ortiz or complete minuets for piano à la Mozart as final projects. About twenty percent of the class reliably came up with amazingly good pieces, good enough to pass as authentic.

Memorization is useful for having at least one or two pieces in your head for a while (Nadia Boulanger's first question to a student was "Do you know a lot of music by heart?") as examples for modeling, and because the process of memorization can be aided by analysis. Gary Karpinski, in his book on aural skills, cites the need for repeated listening. He says students "…must become intimately familiar with how the piece 'goes' as they answer questions, create graphs, make lists of themes, and so on. In gaining this kind of intimacy with even only a handful of works, listeners can begin to attend to salient formal details in unfamiliar works as well."[23] Brian

[22] Dariusz Terefenko presented a paper on his use of keyboard improvisation over a ground bass at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory in Indianapolis, Nov. 4, 2010.

[23] Gary Karpinski, *Aural Skills Acquisition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 137.

Alegant quotes this line of Karpinski's as the jumping-off point for his article about analyzing without a score, which can easily be integrated into the approach I take, but perhaps not in the first year.[24]

## Part III: Conclusion

Some of the verbs used in this essay ("muddle through," "chip away at" "wrestle with") sound pretty half baked, not at all like lofty pedagogical principles. They go along with my rejection of the step-by-step method, which too often becomes an end in itself, in favor of experience. You may well have questions about how to fit all these touchy-feely activities into the context of a curriculum, where each level is predicated on the preceding. I think we have to be willing to admit that the first-year counterpoint or harmony is not rocket science, and that simpler lessons will be learned more thoroughly if they are supported by polymorphous knowledge. Then upper-level learning will take place on a firmer foundation. It basically means redefining what music theory is to include: tactile, acoustical, performative theory applied to a single style at a time.

[24] Brian Alegant, "Listen Up!: Thoughts on iPods, Sonata Form, and Analysis without Score," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 22 (2008): 149-76.

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