

Cover Letter:

This is the syllabus for an advanced aural skills course I taught at Yale in Fall 2020. In submitting this syllabus for the SMT Award for Diversity Course Design, I was specifically thinking about graduate students, adjunct and non-tenured faculty, professors with heavy teaching loads—all of us for whom designing an entirely new course is rarely an option. I wanted to show that there are many meaningful changes we can make while working within the constraints of a standard music theory sequence. From an organizing standpoint, this represents a combined top-down and bottom-up approach to change (with tenured folks creating new courses and curricula being the top-down part).

My syllabus works toward the goals of antiracist teaching in three ways, all of which are easily transferrable to any course in an introductory music theory sequence:

- 1) **Antiracist framing:** A series of “critical humanities” readings addresses the power structures that have shaped the presentation of knowledge in our field. The first three readings teach the hidden curriculum, tokenism, and the white racial frame. The fourth reading provides a class lens, while the fifth reframes music-theoretical concepts as agents of social mediation. Together, these readings can powerfully reshape how students think about music theory: more than a formalist explanation of “how music works,” theory always serves specific political and cultural viewpoints.
- 2) **Diversification of course material:** Techniques in jazz harmony are presented alongside classical ones. I use a flipped classroom model, assigning students YouTube videos as homework to introduce jazz and classical topics. Students then integrate insights from the readings into their learning of new theoretical concepts: In class, we discuss the “hidden curricula” (Palfy and Gilson 2018) and “specific codes of behavior” (Madrid 2017) that guide how music theory is presented in the videos. You are welcome to adapt the slides I’ve provided for your own use. All supplementary materials are housed [here](#).
- 3) **More equitable assessment:** Midterm and final exams with dictation and sight singing are not used. Instead, students give midterm and final presentations that delve more deeply into a topic of their choosing. In this way, the course is less like a math class and more like a reading survey, where students are introduced to a variety of topics and can pursue the ones that interest them. Students still work to improve their sight singing and dictation skills in homework assignments graded on completion. Students sort themselves into fundamental and advanced groups for each skill. In this way, students who want to take higher-level courses can continue to push themselves, while other students can improve at their own pace without being held to unrealistic standards of achievement.

Diversification on its own is a good goal, but it is not antiracist unless an analysis of power structures is involved. Acknowledging past and present injustices is necessary for reparative work, and in my experience, it’s something students are eager to talk about. My students reacted very positively to this course, writing that the readings “deeply enriched the basic survey of harmonic concepts” they had expected. In their final presentations, a majority of students opted to explore topics associated with Black musical styles and issues of racial justice. Please reach out to me with any questions or comments about your own adaptation of these ideas. I’m always happy to be in conversation!

# MUSI 219: Advanced Musicianship & Aural Skills

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Two 50-minute meetings per week

## Course Description:

If you're reading this syllabus, I'm betting you already know your way around the musical staff. You've probably done a dictation or two, and maybe you're even a master solfegger. Dividing musicianship into little bunches of skills allows us to master them individually, but what about the bigger picture? Added together, the skills you learn in this class amount to a statement of value, a judgment about what musicians *need* to know. It's no secret that music theory courses have traditionally been built around classical music. Yet, drawing our skills and topics of study solely from the classical canon fails to capture the richness of what musicianship can mean to different people and communities.

In this class, we will collectively craft a broader and more equitable definition of musicianship: In addition to working on topics in classical and jazz harmony, a "critical humanities" portion of the class will provide frameworks for thinking through the ethical responsibilities of musical theorizing and scholarship. You will have ample opportunities to practice skills like sight singing and dictation in "skills groups," but your grade will not be assigned according to an objective measure of your facility with these skills. Instead, each student will give ten-minute midterm and final presentations on topics of their choice (I will approve your topic to ensure it is related enough to the course material). An individual meeting with the instructor is required the week before each presentation.

## Learning Objectives:

At the end of this course: (1) You will be able to identify by ear a variety of chromatic harmonic techniques in classical, jazz, and pop music. (2) You will be conversant in how issues of racial, gender, and class equity impact music theorizing. (3) You will have gained confidence in your dictation, sight reading, and rhythm skills.

## Topics:

### *Classical Harmony*

- Secondary dominants
- Diatonic and chromatic fifths sequences
- Fully-diminished and half-diminished seventh chords with common-tone and leading-tone resolutions
- Neapolitan chords
- Modal mixture
- Neo-Riemannian relations

### *Jazz Harmony*

- ii-V-I progressions
- Descending fifths sequences
- Chordal extensions
- Rootless voicings
- Tritone substitution

### *Critical Humanities Readings*

- Palfy, Cora and Eric Gilson. "The Hidden Curriculum in the Music Theory Classroom." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*, vol. 32, 2018, pp. 79–110.
- Madrid, Alejandro. "Diversity, Tokenism, Non-Canonical Musics, and the Crisis of the Humanities in U.S. Academia." *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2017, pp. 124–127.
- Ewell, Philip. "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame." *Music Theory Online*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2020.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Introduction to the First Edition." *Distinction*, translated by Richard Nice, Routledge, 1984, pp. xxiv–xxx.
  - \*Could be substituted with: Washburne, Christopher and Maiken Derno. "Introduction." *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, edited by Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno, Routledge, 2004, pp. 1–14.\*
- Born, Georgina. "Music and the Social." *The Cultural Study of Music*, edited by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, Routledge, 2012, pp. 261– 274.
  - \*And/or my own introductory outline to media theory. This could lead the class into a more philosophical/ontological discussion of the elements of music theory. [LINK TO OUTLINE HERE](#).\*

### **Skills Groups:**

Early in the semester, you will take an informal placement test equivalent to the final exam for MUSI 218. Based on your experience with the placement test, you will sort yourselves into skills groups for singing and dictation. You're welcome to change groups at any point in the semester.

#### *Choose one:*

- Dictation Review: hone your dictation skills with reductions and model phrases sourced from Gary Karpinski's *Manual for Ear Training and Sight Singing*.
- Advanced Dictation: challenge yourself with excerpts from Romantic chamber and solo repertoire as well as pop music.

#### *Choose one:*

- Sight Singing Review: practice your recognition of treble and bass clefs, key signatures, diatonic scale degrees, and basic syncopation.
- Advanced Sight Singing: challenge yourself singing chromatic intervals, tenor and alto clefs, syncopated jazz standards, polyrhythms, and randomly generated twelve-tone rows.

### **Homework:**

Most weeks, you will be assigned one sight singing assignment and one dictation as homework. All homework assignments are graded on completion, but I will correct and hand back your work to facilitate your learning. The midterm and final assessments of your skills will have the same format as all of the homework but I will add 10 points for correctness on to the usual 10 points for completion. Because this class is only 0.5 credits, I have designed homework assignments that should take one hour or less. If you spend more than one hour on a homework assignment and are feeling stuck, you may turn it in partially completed and meet with me individually to discuss.

\*Assigning dictation and sight singing primarily as homework is an artifact of this course having been designed for remote teaching. However, even for in-person teaching, I believe that positioning

these activities mostly outside of class-time is more equitable. Many students do not enjoy singing in front of their peers, and as for dictation, allowing students to start and stop the track and to use an instrument is more relevant to how they would transcribe music outside of a class setting. If instructors would like to do more group singing and rhythm activities during class, they could intensify the flipped classroom model, assigning more of the lectures/listening activities as homework.\*

**Grading:**

- 30% Attendance
- 10% Participation
- 30% Homework
- 15% Midterm Presentation
- 15% Final Presentation

**Attendance Policy:**

All unexcused absences will detract from your attendance grade. Due to the nature of this course's subject material, attendance is particularly important. Listening activities cannot be made up outside of class.

**Course Calendar:**

Week 1

Class 1. (1) Introductions. (2) Small group discussion: define what it means to be a composer/define what it means to be a music theorist. (3) Pair and share discussion: dictation strategies.

*Homework:* Take-home placement test: dictation, sight singing, recognition of seventh-chords and diatonic intervals. Try not to take more than one hour on this test.

Class 2. (1) Reflection on practice test: what felt familiar to you, and what was challenging? Email your reflection to me along with your preferred skills groups. (2) Sight singing activities in skills groups.

*Homework:* Read (selections from) Palfy, Cora and Eric Gilson. "The Hidden Curriculum in the Music Theory Classroom." *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*, vol. 32, 2018, pp. 79–110.

Week 2

Class 1. Discuss Palfy/Gilson reading.

*Homework:* Sight singing assignment in skills groups. Students should email me a recording of them singing the excerpt(s).

Class 2. (1) Lecture: secondary dominants. (2) Listening activity with model chord progressions and excerpts from Bach chorales.

*Homework:* Dictation assignment in skills groups.

Week 3

Class 1. (1) Lecture: Diatonic and chromatic sequences lecture. Source: [open music theory](#). (2) Listening activity with model chord progressions and the development of Beethoven

Symphony no. 1. **\*Students should identify whether they hear a diatonic or chromatic sequence, and use the circle of fifths to identify which key/chord ends the sequence.\***

*Homework:* Sight singing. Record yourself singing each of the four lines of the dictation assigned last week, and put it together using a DAW.

Class 2. (1) Lecture: Sequences + ii-V-I progressions in jazz. Source: [open music theory](#). (2) Listening activity with jazz seventh-chord qualities: minor, major, and dominant.

*Homework:* Pop music dictation assignment in skills groups.

#### Week 4

Class 1. (1) Listening activity: Sequences in jazz, using “Autumn Leaves,” “Fly Me to the Moon,” and “All the Things You Are.” (2) Small group discussion: how do these pieces use sequences to shape song form? **\*LINK TO SLIDES [HERE](#).\***

*Homework:* Read Madrid, Alejandro. “Diversity, Tokenism, Non-Canonical Musics, and the Crisis of the Humanities in U.S. Academia.” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2017, pp. 124 –127.

Class 2. Discuss Madrid reading.

*Homework:* (1) Sight reading rhythm assignment in skills groups. (2) Watch these three YouTube videos introducing [minor ninth chords in neo-soul](#), [diminished seventh-chord construction](#), and [common-tone resolutions](#). Come to class prepared to discuss these videos in connection to the Palfy/Gilson and Madrid readings: what “hidden curriculum” is communicated in each video? How does the presenter in each video talk about theory and present the concept? What “specific codes of behavior” characterize the use of this chord in its musical context?

#### Week 5

Class 1. (1) Lecture: common-tone and leading-tone resolutions. (2) Discussion: “hidden curriculum” in the three YouTube videos.

*Homework:* Dictation assignment in skills groups.

Class 2. Listening activity: common-tone and leading-tone seventh-chord resolutions in the music of Edmond Dédé (*Marquise Pompadour – Gavotte; Douleur et Gaîté – Mazurka; Chicago Valse*.) Source: [Music Theory Examples by BI-POC Composers](#).

**\*After students identify the chord and resolution types that are written, I replace what is written with other chord/resolution types at the piano, showing how certain chord-types are functionally interchangeable.\***

**\*LINK TO SLIDES [HERE](#).\***

*Homework:* Sight singing assignment in skills groups.

#### Week 6

Class 1. (1) Lecture: chordal extensions and rootless voicings. (2) Activity: transcribe the chords in [the video about neo-soul](#) at 1:30 and find their roots.

**\*LINK TO SLIDES [HERE](#).\***

*Homework:* Dictation assignment in skills groups.

Class 2. Individual meetings with the instructor about midterm presentations.

*Homework:* Sight singing assignment in skills groups **with added midterm assessment score.**

#### Week 7

Class 1. Midterm presentations.

*Homework:* Dictation assignment in skills groups **with added midterm assessment score.**

Class 2. Midterm presentations.

*Homework:* Read (selections from) Ewell, Philip. "Music Theory and the White Racial Frame." *Music Theory Online*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2020.

#### Week 8

Class 1. Discuss Ewell reading.

*Homework:* (1) Sight singing assignment in skills groups. (2) Watch [this video](#) introducing the Neapolitan chord, and selections from [this video](#) introducing tritone substitutions (the important parts are 5:00-7:11; 9:00-13:30; and 15:35-17:00). Come to class prepared to discuss the "hidden curriculum" aspects of these videos.

Class 2. (1) Discussion: "hidden curriculum" in the YouTube videos on Neapolitan chords and tritone substitution. (2) Lecture: Neapolitan chords. Sources: [musictheory.net](#) and [musictheory.pugetsound.edu](#). (3) Listening activity: Beethoven Sonata Op. 27 no. 2 & Chopin Nocturne Op. 55 no. 1.

**\*Replace N6 with iv and iio6 and have students identify between them.\***

*Homework:* Dictation assignments in skills groups.

#### Week 9

Class 1. (1) Lecture: tritone substitutions. (2) Listening activity: model chord progressions (ii-V-I sequences switching out V for a tritone sub), "Satin Doll," and "Girl from Ipanema."

**\*LINK TO SLIDES [HERE](#).\***

*Homework:* (1) Sight singing assignment in skills groups. (2) Watch these two videos introducing modal mixture [in classical music](#) and [jazz](#). Come to class prepared to discuss the "hidden curriculum" aspects of these videos.

Class 2. (1) Discussion: "hidden curriculum" in the videos about modal mixture. (2) Lecture: modal mixture in classical, jazz, and pop music. Source: [musictheory.pugetsound.edu](#).

*Homework:* Pop music dictation assignment in skills groups.

#### Week 10

Class 1. Listening activities: modal mixture in Scott Joplin's *Augusta Club Waltz*. Source: [Music Theory Examples by BI-POC Composers](#).

**\*LINK TO SLIDES [HERE](#).\***

*Homework:* Read Bourdieu, Pierre. "Introduction to the First Edition." *Distinction*, translated by Richard Nice, Routledge, 1984, pp. xxiv-xxx.

Class 2. Discuss Bourdieu reading.

*Homework:* (1) Sight singing assignment in skills groups. (2) Watch [this video](#) introducing Neo-Riemannian theory.

#### Week 11

Class 1. (1) Lecture: Neo-Riemannian theory. (2) Listening activity: L-P cycles in Schubert's Piano Trio Op. 100 and Schubert's Mass in E-flat. Source: Cohn (2012) *Audacious Euphony* Chapter 2.

*Homework:* Dictation assignment in skills groups.

Class 2. Review/catch-up day

*Homework:* Read (1) Born, Georgina. "Music and the Social." *The Cultural Study of Music*, edited by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton, Routledge, 2012, pp. 261–274. (2) My own media theory online.

#### Week 12

Class 1. Discuss Born reading.

*Homework:* Sight singing assignment in skills groups **with added final assessment score.**

Class 2. Individual meetings for final presentations.

*Homework:* Dictation assignment in skills groups **with added final assessment score.**

#### Week 13

Class 1. Final Presentations.

Class 2. Final Presentations.

#### **Respectful Behavior Agreement:**

It's normal to feel nervous when we perform in front of our peers. In this class you will sometimes be asked to sing in front of your peers, and you will definitely make mistakes. This is part of the learning process. In light of the vulnerability involved in this class's core activities, it is imperative that we behave respectfully toward each other. By enrolling in this class, you are agreeing to do your part in creating a safe, supportive, and encouraging classroom climate. In particular, please do not interrupt your classmates, or myself as the instructor, when we are speaking or singing. Each one of you should feel comfortable taking musical risks without fear of judgment.

#### **Academic Integrity Statement:**

As Willie Jennings writes, "Plagiarism is the act of taking the ideas, words, and voice of another without clear and precise acknowledgement that they are the source. But what does it mean to take the ideas, words, and voice of another in a world and in educational systems that were formed by theft and shaped by a taking that continues to this very moment?" (*After Whiteness*, 43). The purpose of this class is to develop your musical skills and academic voice; please do not let someone else's work represent your own. However, please also work to cultivate an ethics of care in your interactions with knowledge. What would it mean to enter into a relationship with knowledge, rather than treating knowledge as an object you possess?

**Student Accessibility Statement:**

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or that form barriers to your inclusion, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies that can enable you to succeed in the course. I encourage you to visit [Student Accessibility Services](#) to determine how you could improve your learning as well. If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met. There is also a range of resources on campus, including the [Writing Center](#), [Residential College Tutors](#), and [Academic Strategies](#).

**I look forward to getting to know you all over the semester, and to improving our musicianship skills together!**