

General Examination in Theory

August 2008

(Monday, 8/25, 9 a.m.-12 noon)

(Monday, 8/25, 2-5 p.m.)

(Wednesday, 8/27, 9 a.m.-noon)

(Wednesday, 8/27, 2-5 p.m.)

(Friday, 8/29, 9 a.m.-

Tuesday, 9/2, 12 noon)

1. Theoretical Systems

2. Topic 1: Brahms Analysis

3. Topic 2: Harmonic Rhythm

4. History of Theory

5. Music Analysis (take-home paper)

2008 General Examination in Theory

Monday, August 25, 9:00 a.m.- 12 noon

1. Theoretical Systems

3 hours

Choose **two** questions from these three sections; each question must come from a different section. Use music examples (in pertinent analytical notation where appropriate) and illustrations from relevant repertoires to underscore your argument. Avoid using the same materials in multiple answers.

1. Schenker

- a. Discuss the role of $\hat{4}$ in the structural descent.
- b. Examine the tensions between Schenker and traditional approaches to form.

2. *Transformations*

- a. Unravel Klumpenhouwer networks.
- b. Explore how recent approaches to neo-Riemannian approaches have teamed up with cognitive approaches. What are the strengths, what are the weaknesses of this combination?

3. *pc-set Theory*

- a. Discuss issues of segmentation in pc-sets.
- b. To what extent is the observation justified that pc-set theory took principles from twelve-tone music and applied it to a wider (and earlier) repertoire? Explore the consequences.

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Monday, August 25, 2:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.

2. Special Topic I: Brahms Analysis

3 Hours

Answer **two** of the three questions. Avoid using the same materials in multiple answers. You are encouraged to underscore your points with pertinent examples wherever they may help clarify or strengthen your argument.

- a. Kofi Agawu has argued that the concept of ambiguity in music theory is meaningless. Do you agree? And if so, would this constitute a loss to Brahms analysis?
- b. **EITHER:** Brahms was an avid collector and editor of pre-tonal music. Are there non-trivial, theoretical ways to show how this interest in early music was reflected in his own music?
OR: “Allusion” in Brahms is a popular conceit in musicological scholarship that is often wanting on the level of analytical specificity. Using pertinent examples, can you salvage the concept by underpinning it with theoretically sound arguments?
- c. Does Schoenberg’s concept of “developing variation” hold anything of interest in stock for today’s theorists?

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Wednesday, August 27, 9:00 a.m. – 12 noon

3. Special Topic II: Harmonic Rhythm

3 Hours

Answer **two** of the three questions. Avoid using the same materials in multiple answers. You are encouraged to underscore your points with pertinent examples wherever they may help clarify or strengthen your argument.

- a. Do we have a cogent theory of harmonic rhythm to speak of? Critique existing models, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses.
- b. Explore the specific relationships between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dance forms and the evolution of harmonic rhythm.
- c. **EITHER:** “In the later eighteenth century, European art music began to take the flow of time from the past to the future seriously. Until then, music was simply ‘in time,’ [...] the distinction between past and future, between ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ did not much matter to the way it was experienced and understood. From then on, music also made time’s arrow, the experience of linear time, its essential subject matter.” (BERGER). – Discuss Berger’s claim, contrasting procedures in Baroque and Classical music.
OR: “The historical leap that the *Eroica* realized through sound has to do with its usage of temporal structure. It is the temporalization of musical form.” (BRINKMANN). Explore the part harmonic rhythm plays in this important feature of the *Eroica* (or any other pertinent work by Beethoven).

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Wednesday, August 27, 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

4. History of Music Theory

3 Hours

Choose **two** questions from these three sections; each question must come from a different section. Avoid using the same materials in multiple answers. You are encouraged to underscore your points with pertinent examples wherever they may help clarify or strengthen your argument.

1. Early modern

- a. Attempt a short archeology of the chord: what factors needed to be in place for theorists to conceive of a chord? (You may argue, if you wish, specifically with reference to major or the minor harmonies.)
- b. Why did questions of tuning and intonation form such an important part of musical thought in the early modern age?

2. Eighteenth century

- a. Was there such a thing as “analysis” in eighteenth century theory? (If so, to what extent can it shed light on questions we are currently interested in? If not, speculate about reasons for this absence.)
- b. Explain the *double emploi* and explore its ramifications.

3. Nineteenth century

- a. Imagine you had to write a composition treatise ca. 1850. What features would you include? Explain your choices.
- b. Carl Dahlhaus argued that Riemannian functions were nothing but a more restricted form of *Stufen*. Do you agree? (Provide reasons for your answer.)

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Friday, August 29, 9:00 a.m. – Tuesday September 2, 12 noon

5. Music Analysis (Take-home paper)

You are given two pieces from the tonal repertoire and two from the post-tonal repertoire. Choose **one** from **each** section and write an analytical essay on each of these two pieces. You may use any analytical approach you deem useful for the piece in question. You are encouraged to underscore your points with pertinent musical examples with analytical annotations wherever they may help clarify or strengthen your argument.

Tonal pieces:

1. Frédéric Chopin, *Mazurka*, op. 59 no. 1
2. Hector Berlioz, “Villanelle”, no. 1 from *Les Nuits d’été*

Post-tonal pieces:

1. Alban Berg, *Four Pieces for Clarinet and Piano*, no. 1
2. Luciano Berio, *Sequenza V* for solo trombone