Seminar in Music Theory: Twelve-Tone Techniques
Fall 2019

T 2:00–4:45
MEH 3244

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Office hours: M 9–10, F 11:15–12:15

Course Description

The use of rigorous Schoenbergian twelve-tone technique—where every note of a composition can be traced to a P, R, I, or RI form of a single tone row—characterizes only a small percentage of music that can be called twelve-tone. Recent research decents Schoenbergian dodecaphony and shifts focus to a variety of twelve-tone techniques, each of which poses its own challenges for listening, analysis, and conceptualization. We will explore the theoretical scholarship that makes sense of these techniques not from composer-based (poietic) perspectives, but rather from listener-based (esthesic) perspectives.

Course Requirements

10 response essays (2–3 pages): Write a brief essay in which you respond to some aspect of the reading assigned for that week’s class. There is no set format for the essays, although they should draw on each of the week’s readings in some manner, and if possible, involve some original analysis of music of your choice. Accompanying examples (graphical and musical) are encouraged, although they do not count toward the page length requirement. Essays are due on Monday at 11:59 p.m., the evening before our class meeting. Upload them to Blackboard, then read your classmates’ essays. I will not provide written feedback on the response essays, but I will use them to help shape our class discussion for the week.

2 short presentations (15 minutes): Share complete analyses of twelve-tone works of your choice. The short presentations are intended to display your work-in-progress toward the final paper. Annotated scores, handouts, bibliography, and recordings may all be used.

Final presentation (30 minutes) and paper (20–30 pages): Write a scholarly paper that presents a new idea, situated with respect to the existing literature, with regard to some twelve-tone repertoire or theory. The paper should draw on extensive original analysis and should contain several musical examples and a robust bibliography. Present your findings in a 30-minute class presentation, which may be formal (conference-style) or informal in orientation.
August 27
Twelve-Toneness
No essay due


September 3
Dodecaphony
Essay #1 due (analytical)

Anton Webern, Symphony, op. 21, II (1928).
Arnold Schoenberg, Piano Piece, op. 33a (1929).

The Webern and Schoenberg works are strictly dodecaphonic. Determine the tone rows yourself (try to avoid looking them up), and produce a tone-row analysis. The Schnittke movement includes both twelve-tone and non-twelve-tone material. Consult the following essay for a point of entry into your analysis.


September 10
North America
Essay #2 due


September 17
Twelve-Tone Chords
Essay #3 due


September 24
Schoenberg and His School
Essay #4 due


October 1
Presentation #1
October 8
Precursors to Twelve-Tone Technique
Essay #5 due


October 15
Stravinsky and Shostakovich
Essay #6 due

Joseph N. Straus, Stravinsky’s Late Music (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 64–182.


October 22
Schnittke and Denisov
Essay #7 due


October 29
Presentation #2

November 5
Webern
Essay #8 due


November 12
Post-War Avant-Garde
Essay #9 due


November 19
Problems of Serialism
Essay #10 due


November 26 & December 3
Final Presentations

December 10
Final Paper due