

Distinguished Lecturers in Music Theory Series

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The Black Amen: Plagal Cadences in Contemporary Gospel Music

Tuesday, March 22nd, 2022
12:45pm EDT
Via Zoom

Register for Zoom Webinar at
<https://bit.ly/3tg664j>

**Informal conversation with graduate
students immediately to follow**

Lecture Abstract:

Lacking the perceived finality of an authentic cadence, the plagal cadence is often treated as a weaker alternative and seldom seen in common practice music. Its most familiar and prevalent use is its one-off sounding in harmonizing the word “Amen” at the end of a hymn. However, in contemporary Black church music IV-I cadences abound in singular compositions, notably at critical formal junctures where one might expect a more traditionally definitive V-I ending. The presence of these gospel cadential gestures challenge the conventional avoidance of the ostensibly feeble ascending 5th bass motion as an interval of closure and necessitates a reconsideration of its power as a “proper” harmonic ending. In this talk, I introduce the concept of the “innerplagal” and show how the plagal cadence is both a significant indicator of closure in modern gospel and a communicative and cultural gesture related to the “Amen” setting.

Bio:

Richard Desinord is a music theory professor with research interests in contemporary gospel and Neo-soul, though he enjoys all aspects of music theory from all genres. Currently he is a lecturer of music theory at Howard University and a PhD candidate at the Eastman School of Music. Hailing from Washington, D.C., he earned a BM in music education from Howard University and an MA in music theory from Penn State University. One of his personal and professional goals is to make music theory more accessible to and inclusive of people of color.