

DISTINGUISHED RESIDENCY IN MUSIC THEORY PEDAGOGY

“The Non-neutrality of Part Writing”



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Tuesday, March 19, 2019, 6:15 p.m.
Cook Recital Hall

Free and open to the public.

ABSTRACT

For much of the twentieth century, American music theory pedagogy focused on the teaching of harmony through chorale-style part writing in four voices. Many textbooks published today have expanded their topical and stylistic purview, yet they still rely significantly on four-voice homorhythmy for the study of harmony, treating it as a neutral texture through which details of chord function and voice leading may be studied in abstraction. This paper reassesses the role of chorale style in music theory pedagogy by examining its transmission from nineteenth-century German compositional theory into the mass-market American textbook industry of the twentieth century. A survey of historical statements regarding the teaching of Western common-practice harmony through chorale style reveals that it was a choice based on aesthetic and political viewpoints that are fundamentally incompatible with the rapidly expanding goals of music theory pedagogy in the twenty-first century. I report the benefits and pitfalls of my initial efforts to pull apart the seemingly rigid nexus of tonality, harmony, and four-voice homorhythmy in order to achieve a more parametrically- and stylistically-diverse curriculum.

BIO

Anna Gawboy is Associate Professor of Music Theory at Ohio State University, where she coordinates the second-year music theory curriculum. Her work on music theory pedagogy has appeared in the *Norton Guide to Teaching Music Theory*, *Music Theory Online*, *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*, and *Engaging Students*, for which she served as a co-founding editor. She is the author of nearly two hundred pedagogical videos in music theory, including tutorials accompanying *A Concise Introduction to Tonal Harmony* by Joe Straus and Poundie Burstein.

