

Conference Report: Pedagogy into Practice 2

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Following the successful inaugural Pedagogy into Practice conference in June 2017 at Lee University, the second biennial Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century conference was held May 23–25, 2019 at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Sponsored by the Gail Boyd de Stwolinski Center for Music Theory Pedagogy in partnership with the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy*, the Pedagogy into Practice conferences have joined a flourishing of pedagogy-oriented conferences, workshops, and publications in the last decade, including, for example, the Workshops in Music Theory Pedagogy at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (organized by Gary Karpinski), the Summer Institute for Music Theory Pedagogy at Eastman, the combination of the print and online versions of the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* into an open access online journal, the Engaging Students Unconferences, and the open source, open access journal *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy*. The Pedagogy into Practice conference occupies a distinct niche by marrying a traditional conference approach—peer review of proposals for papers, workshops, panels, and posters, along with invited keynote speakers—with an intentionally open, engaged, and inclusive atmosphere. This is a conference where all those who theorize and practice student-centered pedagogies are welcome, whether they are students, high school teachers, or distinguished professors (all of whom were explicitly invited in the call for papers). The conference organizers intentionally built time and space into the program—through shared breaks and meals, interactive keynote addresses, and group conversations such as the “coda” capping the conference—for attendees to think, interact, and reflect both individually and collectively. While I cannot cover all of the papers, posters, panels, and workshops presented, I hope to give a sense of both the themes that emerged and the types of interactions that made this conference so engaging and inspiring.¹

¹ The conference program, abstracts, and supplemental materials are available at <https://jmtpp.appstate.edu/conference/past-conferences/2019-santa-barbara-o>.

The program committee was chaired by Rebecca Jemian, and included Timothy Chenette, Bryn Hughes, Rachel Mitchell, Susan Piagentini, Derek Remeš, and Jena Root; Janet Bourne and Ben Levy coordinated local arrangements. The conference program helpfully shared information about the number and type of proposals as well as the approximate acceptance rates by gender and rank

Keynote speakers—J. Daniel Jenkins (University of South Carolina), Daniel Stevens (University of Delaware), and Cynthia Gonzalez (Texas State University)—anchored each day of the conference. In the first keynote, “Public Music Theory and Pedagogy,” Jenkins described his experiences teaching music theory to inmates at Lee Correctional Institution, including bringing together his students from the university and his students at Lee to work on a joint concert at the prison. In addition to helping his university students expand their comfort zones, Jenkins’s work helps inmates recognize themselves as talented musicians regardless of their circumstances. The core question posed by Jenkins’s talk still haunts me: why did these men have to go to prison in order to access this kind of opportunity for music education? In this case, public music theory is about far more than chord symbols and time signatures, surfacing issues of class, race, and unequal access to educational opportunities embedded in our current system.

Daniel Stevens encouraged us to play musically in new spaces in the second keynote, “Never Twice the Same: Listening and Improvisation.” This was not an ordinary keynote lecture: we were asked to sit in groups of five, preferably with people we did not know before the conference, and evenly distributed throughout the auditorium. Beginning with an improvisation of a very short but complete piece based on sounds drawn from the names of the people in each group, and ending with participants building a small LEGO model whose spatial characteristics were then translated into musical ideas as the basis for group improvisation, Stevens skillfully led the large audience through a series of structured improvisations and reflections that situated improvisation as central to aural skills rather than “extra,” and ended with suggestions to radically re-center aural skills around solving “real-world creative problems that depend on the ability to think in sound.”

In the final keynote, “SmartMusic: Removing the ‘Fear Factor’ from Sight Singing and Aural Skills,” Cynthia Gonzalez demonstrated how she thoughtfully incorporates technology into aural skills. SmartMusic was originally developed for instrumentalists to practice their ensemble parts, and Gonzalez illuminated the complex process by which an end user can engage productively with a vendor to help them better adapt their software to new uses and purposes. By developing targeted, customized materials and providing the opportunity for immediate and nuanced feedback to student singing, Gonzalez showed how technology not only helps students learn, but also provides students with agency to direct their own learning.

(where known). The Gail Boyd de Stwolinski Center for Music Theory Pedagogy is led by Steven Laitz (director) and Jennifer Snodgrass (assistant director).

In addition to the keynote presentations, the conference comprised eight paper sessions (Pedagogy and Extensions of Music Theory, Aural Skills, Global Pedagogy, Writing, Addressing the Range of Students, Models for Learning, Expanding our Approach, and Fundamentals and Inclusivity), a panel (From Core to Cores), a combination of a panel and related papers (Diversifying the Curriculum), six workshops (Incorporating Music by Women, Assisting Student With Memory Deficits, Galant Schemas and Aural Training, Hearing the Waves, SLOs and Timbre, and Aural Skills) and a poster session featuring twenty-seven posters in five categories (Technology, Performance Skills, Games, Musical Design, and Curriculum and Learning).

There was no better way to start the conference than with a panel addressing some of the big questions that many of us face: How do we redesign our current core curriculum to serve the needs of a variety of students, from traditional performance and music education majors to music therapy and music technology students, all of whom may need a range of different theoretical and aural skills to thrive in their musical and professional lives? Greg McCandless, Jennifer Snodgrass, and Andrew Hannon (Appalachian State University) described their new curricular model, which expands the concept of core theory to multiple cores, embracing a variety of courses tailored to specific student needs, including the possibility of core electives that students can select to round out their theory sequence. It was valuable to see the juxtaposition of the “ideal” curriculum that was initially proposed with the curriculum that was finally adopted after working through complex collegial discussions and practical constraints and mandates, especially for those considering a monumental undertaking like this. Later in the conference, these issues were reinforced by Andrew Gades (College of Idaho), Megan Lavengood (George Mason University), and Crystal Peebles (Ithaca College), who discussed their differing approaches to modularizing the theory core at each of their institutions, with a focus on diversifying the content of the theory core, exploring non-sequential course options, and providing the opportunity for intersections with other disciplines.

In addition to restructuring the theory core itself, another theme that emerged from the conference was the need to reimagine the content of our music theory courses in a variety of ways. One approach was to expand the traditional canon by incorporating, for example, film music (Janet Bourne, University of California, Santa Barbara), popular music (Christopher Doll, Rutgers University; and Andrew Aziz, San Diego State University), and music by underrepresented composers. I especially draw attention to the workshop by Elizabeth West Marvin, Molly Murdock (both Eastman School of Music) and Jane Piper Clendinning (Florida State University) on

incorporating more music by women into the classroom. This interactive workshop trained participants in online resources for locating music by women, explored several pieces through small group listening and analysis, and then shared the results of those analyses with conference participants.² In addition to expanding the canon, multiple presentations challenged participants to rethink traditional topics, including decentering chorale-style writing (Marcelle Pierson, University of Pittsburgh), re-centering error detection (Amy Fleming and Edward Taylor, Baylor University), and incorporating Galant schemas into counterpoint, harmony, and voice leading pedagogy (Nathan Baker, Casper College). Several presenters focused on incorporating important but often overlooked aspects of music and music theorizing, such as the use of traditional aural skills techniques to teach students to identify different synthesized waveforms and basic audio processes in popular music (Paul Thomas, Texas Woman's University), the inclusion of timbre as a salient dimension of music (e.g., William Mason, Wheaton College-Massachusetts; Nora Engebretsen, Bowling Green State University; and Patricia Burt, University of Delaware), and the incorporation of the practice of public music theory (Aaron Grant, Missouri Western State University). A full session focused on writing in music theory courses, not only to develop writing skills, but also as a way to foster broader communication, public presentation, analysis, and reflection skills (Andrew Farina, Butler University; Anna Ferenc, Wilfrid Laurier University; Joan Huguet, Knox College; William Marvin, Eastman School of Music; and Angela Ripley, College of Wooster).

Another significant theme that emerged was an emphasis on applying research in perception and cognition—and not just music perception and cognition research—to how we teach in the classroom. Several papers explored how musical experiences and implicit as well as explicit learning can create mental representations of auditory images to facilitate aural skills (Elizabeth Monzingo, Ohio State University; Elizabeth Sayrs, Ohio University) and can influence how absolute pitch manifests in different cultures (Elizabeth West Marvin, Eastman School of Music and Su Yin Mak, The Chinese University of Hong Kong). Others wove issues of working memory and cognitive load into broader pedagogical frameworks (e.g., Mark Gotham, Cornell University; and Michael Callahan, Michigan State University). Several sessions helped participants get a glimpse of their students' cognitive processes, whether through using cognition research to posit what happens in a student's head as they become more fluent at melodic dictation (David John Baker, Louisiana State University), or by actually

2 In addition to the materials available on the conference web site, additional resources from this workshop are available at <http://musictheoryexamplesbywomen.com/conference/>.

helping participants briefly experience the type of cognitive load that is created when we ask students to perform even some of the most basic activities in music theory. To illustrate the magnitude of what we routinely ask novice music theory students to do, Leigh VanHandel (Michigan State University) asked participants in her workshop on memory to perform a simple task—just spell some chords—but with a little twist: instead of using the letters A through G for pitch names, participants were asked to use the letters H through N. Even something as basic as what feels like the “natural” and easy alignment of pitches with letter names was instantly revealed as a significant draw on a novice’s limited attention and memory.

For me, one of the most inspiring themes to emerge was an emphasis on inclusive pedagogies, reflecting broader trends across higher education, with a focus on changing how we teach in order to meet the needs of a variety of students and to leverage the distinct knowledge and experiences that every student brings to the classroom (Adam J. Kolek, Rowan University). Susan Piagentini’s (Northwestern University) discussion of informal music learning began with the premise that self- and peer-directed learning is critical, and that learning tasks should begin with music that students already know, understand, and choose for themselves. Several papers focused on creating inclusive learning outcomes (Scott M. Strovas and Ann B. Stutes, Wayland Baptist University) and inclusive assessments that provide multiple opportunities for students to show what they have learned (Stefanie Bilidas and Zachary Lloyd, Michigan State University; Andrew Conklin, University of the Pacific). Jane Piper Clendinning (with Nancy Rogers, Colleen Ganley, and Sara Hart, Florida State University) presented work of the Mathematics and Music Theory Project, which brings together faculty members from psychology and music to explore the relationship between math-related learning disabilities (such as the ability to identify visual patterns and recognize representations of rotated three-dimensional objects) and success in music theory courses, including an innovative diagnostic exam. The goal is to identify students who may struggle in theory courses and to intervene and assist those students early in their academic careers, possibly by identifying more efficient ways of attending to musical information.

Finally, the poster session was truly a highlight of the conference. Although only sixteen posters were originally submitted, many proposed papers were accepted as posters, and the conference was better for it. As at the inaugural Pedagogy into Practice conference, the poster session was a stand-alone event without any competing sessions, and the venue buzzed with lively and rich conversations. There were opportunities to engage directly with colleagues on a broad range of ideas,

including how to categorize aural skills excerpts to facilitate software retrieval (Gary S. Karpinski, University of Massachusetts, Amherst), the finer points of “sing-and-plays” in aural skills (Samantha M. Inman, Stephen F. Austin State University), and principles for successful gamification in music theory pedagogy (Douglas Buchanan, Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University and Patricia Burt, University of Delaware). I have already implemented some ideas from the poster session in my aural skills class this fall, including ways to cultivate curiosity (Philip Duker, University of Delaware), incorporating more intentional metaphorical opportunities when learning new excerpts (Alex Sallade, University of Delaware), and the use of short review games at the beginning of class (Dana DeVlieger, University of Minnesota and Jennifer Shafer, University of Delaware, who arguably had the best poster title).

While the conference presented a wide range of topics, there were some areas less well represented. In their conference report on the first Pedagogy into Practice conference in 2017, J. Daniel Jenkins and Angela Ripley (2017) noted, “One striking lacuna among the presentations was the lack of discussion of rhythm and meter.” The same was true for this conference. While rhythm and meter were not absent per se—certainly, many papers incorporated aspects of rhythm and meter—theorizing about the pedagogy of rhythm and meter was not a central focus of the works presented.³ And despite the strong emphasis on inclusive pedagogy, compared to recent Society for Music Theory conferences, there seemed to be less focus specifically on issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and less inclusion of world music. I hope that readers interested in these topics will submit proposals for the next Pedagogy into Practice conference scheduled for May 20–22, 2021 at Michigan State University.

My lingering impression of the conference is one in which serendipitous collisions were intentionally fostered—between disparate ideas, between theory and practice, between students, teachers, and scholars. If, as Elizabeth West Marvin (2018) has noted, “theory pedagogy has remained under-represented in mainstream theory research journals,” citing Duinker and Gauvin’s (2017) research that just 2%–5% of the articles in the *Journal of Music Theory*, *Music Theory Online*, and *Music Theory Spectrum* since 1979 have addressed pedagogical topics, this Pedagogy into Practice conference demonstrated that pedagogy’s under-representation is not due to a lack of rigorous, engaging, and important research on the topic.

Perhaps one moment best encapsulates the ethos of the conference: during the

3 This topic became a thread on SMT-Discuss shortly after the conference (<https://discuss.societymusictheory.org/discussion/492/is-no-one-teaching-rhythm-and-meter>). See also Cohn (2015).

Q&A after a paper, an attendee raised her hand and introduced herself as a high school teacher, and said that the session was so valuable to her that she wanted to know how she could get the word out and bring even more high school teachers into the fold. She wanted them to have the same type of transformative music pedagogy experience that she was having. She also admitted that she had been worried the conference would not be accessible to her, but that she had felt welcome and included. This is precisely the type of outreach mission that the Gail Boyd de Stwolinski Center for Music Theory Pedagogy and the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* (and its online resources) embraced several years ago under the leadership of Steven Laitz: to serve as a resource not only for professional music theorists, but for all who teach music theory and aural skills. The second Pedagogy into Practice conference clearly embodied this vision, and the reach, impact, and engagement fostered by the conference bodes well for the evolution of an ever more inclusive and vibrant music theory pedagogy in the future.

**Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-first Century
(May 2019) presentations cited**

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- Baker, David John. 2019 (May). "What is going on in someone's head when they do melodic dictation." Paper presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Baker, Nathan. 2019 (May). "Teaching Counterpoint, Harmony, and Voice Leading with Galant Schemas." Paper presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Bilidas, Stefanie and Zachary Lloyd. 2019 (May). "From Design to Implementation: Creating Inclusive Assessments within the Music Theory Classroom." Paper presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Bourne, Janet. 2019 (May). "'Play it again, Sam': Expanding the Canon by Incorporating Film Music into the Undergraduate Music Theory Classroom." Paper presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Buchanan, Douglas and Patricia Burt. 2019 (May). "Game Design for the Music Theory Classroom." Poster presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Burt, Patricia. 2019 (May). "Expanding the Scope of Theory Fundamentals." Paper presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
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- Farina, Andrew. 2019 (May). "Let's Talk Theory: Fostering Communication Skills in Music Theory via the Research Symposium." Paper presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
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- Gades, Andrew, Megan Lavengood, and Crystal Peebles. 2019 (May). "Diversifying the Theory Curriculum: How to Open Multiple Pathways through the Theory Core." Panel presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
- Gonzalez, Cynthia. 2019 (May). "SmartMusic: Removing the 'Fear Factor' from Sight Singing and Aural Skills." Keynote presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
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- Grant, Aaron. 2019 (May). "Incorporating Public Music Theory into the Undergraduate Core: Rethinking the Final Analytical Paper." Paper presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
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- Marvin, Elizabeth West, Molly Murdock, and Jane Piper Clendinning. 2019 (May). "Tools for Creating a More Inclusive Classroom: Incorporating Music by Women." Workshop presented at *Pedagogy into Practice: Teaching Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century*, Santa Barbara, CA.
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