

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
Division of Humanities & Social Sciences

Fall 2018

Prof. Tom Neenan

Time/Location: Tu/Th 10:30 – 11:55

B133 Baxter

Office hours: Tu/Th 9:00 – 10:00 or by appointment

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### **Mu 57 – Fundamentals of Music Theory**

*Welcome to Mu57! I am a self-proclaimed music theory geek. I love digging into the details of music and trying to figure out how various pieces of music work. I vividly remember my first college-level theory course. The professor had a sense of humor, didn't take himself or the subject matter too seriously, and was a master at engaging us. I have always tried to do that. Every morning a group of us students met before class for breakfast and did our homework together. It was a great way to learn theory and I encourage you to form a similar type of study group. I also vividly remember an upper-level theory course with one of the worst teachers I ever had. You'll no doubt hear about him if you take this class. I do everything in my power to avoid being like him. Please read the following information and if you have questions, by all means ask me. – Tom Neenan*

#### Course Description and a disclaimer

This course is intended to introduce the student to the fundamentals of music theory and to assist the student in improving their sight-singing and score reading abilities. **Note the following from Benward: "No previous knowledge of music theory is required; however, the ability to read music and play an instrument or sing is assumed."** If you have no experience reading music you are welcome to take this course and expect to do well in it. However, most people who take this course have some experience and will have at least some rudimentary piano skills. The pace of the course is determined to some extent by the ability of those in the course to absorb the material and master it. Those with no prior musical experience may find the paces quicker than is comfortable. If you are unsure as to whether the course is right for you, please speak with Prof. Neenan early on.

#### Learning Objectives

In this course we will:

- Learn the fundamentals of music pitch and rhythm notation primarily using the grand staff
- Work to develop a fluency in reading pitch and rhythm notation
- Expand our ability to "discern the design, proportions, and patterns of music," particularly in the areas of scales, keys, intervals and chords<sup>1</sup>
- Expand our knowledge of a historical perspective on musical style
- Acquire, according to the students' own ability:
  - "Insight into the ways...music is put together (as a composer)

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes from Benward, *Music in Theory and Practice*

- A “seeing” ear – “the ability to hear music and determine the nature of the musical devices”
- A “hearing” eye – “the ability to look at music and determine...how it will sound”
- Skill in sight-singing, i.e. reading a line of music and singing it at sight. **Note:** because students come to the theory courses with a wide range of past experience, you are never graded on your ability to sight-sing, though you are required to participate in sight-singing practice.

### Special needs

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with Caltech Accessibility Services for Students (CASS). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact CASS as soon as possible, since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. <http://cass.caltech.edu/>. Undergraduate students should contact Dr. Lesley Nye, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Students (administrative contact: Beth Larranaga) and graduate students should contact Dr. Kate McNulty, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies (administrative contact: Angelica Medina-Cuevas).

### Honor Code

“No member of the Caltech community shall take unfair advantage of any other member of the Caltech community.” The honor code is an important aspect of life on the Caltech campus. I honor it and expect you to do the same.

### Collaboration Policy

With the exception of the three take-home quizzes, you are encouraged to collaborate with others in the class in completing all course assignments and activities.

### Text and other materials

Benward, Bruce & Marilyn Saker: *Music In Theory And Practice, Volume I, Ninth Edition* : New York, MacGraw-Hill. Studies have shown that learning music theory is increased when you work with a print copy of the book, in which you can write. Although Benward is available as an e-book you are **strongly** encouraged to buy a **new** copy of the print version. We will use the book on a daily basis in class and you will be completing and turning in assignments from the text on a regular basis. Trying to work from a tablet, from a different edition, or from an e-book puts you at a disadvantage and adversely affects the flow of activities.

Packets of sight-singing practice material will be distributed at the beginning of the term. A nominal materials fee will be charged to your account.

### Content

Benward, Introduction and Part A. Part or all of Chapter 5 may also be covered, depending on the pace of the class.

### Format

Lecture/demo; supervised drill; discussion; analysis; written exercises, regular homework assignments

## Attendance

Regular Class attendance is expected and taken seriously. Students are allowed 2 unexcused absences with only the 15 points allotted to the daily question being deducted.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, the following schedule of deductions applies:

<u>Number of absences</u>	<u>Total Points to be deducted</u>
1	15
2	30
3	60
more than 3	automatic fail, no exceptions

Overlaps/conflicts with other classes are not permitted.

## Daily Question

Each meeting will begin with a brief, ungraded problem or set of problems based on the homework or a previous meeting. The Daily Question is worth 15 points and is your attendance record. You should try to solve the problem(s) even if you feel unsure. The Daily Question primes review of material previously discussed and helps expose concepts about which you and others may be unsure. Students arriving more than five minutes late may turn in the Daily Question but will receive only 5 points.

## Course Assignments

You must complete the following:

- 1) Moodle profile**
- 2) Syllabus quiz**
- 3) Three Chapter Quizzes**

## Moodle Profile and Syllabus Quiz (Required)

Join Mu57 on Moodle (password: neenan) and complete your personal profile. Make sure to have a few details about yourself in the description and be sure to include what if any music background you have. Do you play a musical instrument or sing? If so, for how long? Do you play – or have you played – in an orchestra or chamber ensemble? The purpose of requesting the above information is to assist me in knowing the level of experience you have in music. If your experience is very limited or non-existent, you can still do very well in this class. Take the Syllabus Quiz before Monday, October 9. You get 3 chances on the quiz.

## Concert Reports

Students may attend one professionally performed concert and write a Concert Report for extra credit following the concert. The concert report is due one week after the performance. If you wish to write a report on a concert not on the list of approved concerts on Moodle, you must seek Prof. Neenan's approval. A Concert Report Guideline will be found on Moodle and should be used in writing all reports. There *may be* a limited number of tickets available for a joint Mu140 / Performing Arts field trip to the LA Philharmonic on Saturday, November 3. More details to follow.

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<sup>2</sup> Students will be excused for justifiable reasons, i.e. illness, family emergencies, job interviews and other important matters. You must notify Prof. Neenan in advance (email) if you wish to be excused from a class meeting. Verification of your excuse may be required.

All concert reports are due one week after the concert that is the subject of the report. Reports submitted late will receive an automatic 10 point deduction.

### Chapter Quizzes

There will be three take-home quizzes given during the term. Quizzes are closed book. The days on which quizzes will be distributed and due will be determined by the pace of the class.

### Homework Assignments

Homework will be assigned by the end of the day after most class meetings. Homework must be completed in pencil (assignments not done in pencil will automatically lose 15 points). You begin the term with 300 points credited to homework assignments. At the beginning of many class meetings we will review the assignments in class. When we do, please make any corrections in ink so that when I review them I can easily look for areas that we should review during the next class meeting. Other assignments will be spot-corrected by me and returned to you. Grading will be according to the following plan:

Assignments completed and mostly correct – no deduction

Assignments completed with a couple errors – 5 point deduction

Assignments turned in late, with omissions or with more than a few errors – 10 point deduction.

Assignments not turned in or turned in a week or more late – 15 point deduction

**You are encouraged to collaborate with others** in the class on homework assignments and to visit Prof. Neenan during office hours if you have questions about assignments or concepts.

### Assignment Summary

	Points per activity	Total points possible
Syllabus Quiz		25
Chapter Quizzes	100	300
Attendance/Daily Question	15	300
Homework Assignments	15	300
<i>Optional Concert Report for extra credit</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>

### Pre-course evaluation

At the beginning of the term you will be given a pre-course evaluation. You do not receive a grade on the evaluation. The evaluation helps me determine your knowledge about and prior experience in music theory. Some students will be referred to Mu58, winter term. Others will be excused from the first few weeks of class (though you are invited to attend). Others will be required to begin attending on the second day of class. Students who are excused from attending the first couple of weeks of class will receive credit for the Daily Questions and Homework Assignments during the period they are excused. **Students excused from meetings at the beginning of the term are not excused from the first Chapter Quiz and should check with Prof. Neenan via email or on Moodle as to the distribution date of the first quiz.**

### Grade scale and rationale

Grades are reflective of a student's overall performance in the class. Students decide what grade they wish to achieve and complete the work accordingly.

Syllabus Quiz	25
Chapter Quizzes	300
Attendance	300
Homework Assignments	300
<i>Concert report (extra credit)</i>	<u>50</u>
Total (excl. extra credit)	925

Grades will be based on a Grading Point of 879 points, or 95% of the total points possible

### Grade Scale (based on 879 Grading Point)

A	95% of Grading Point and above
A-	90% - 94% of Grading point
B	80% - 89% of Grading Point (B- = 80% - 83%; B = 84% - 86%; B+ = 87% - 89%)
C	70% - 79% (same breakdown as above)
D	60% of Grading Point (same breakdown as above)
F	below 60% of Grading Point

**Any student who does not complete all three chapter quizzes will fail the course. No exceptions.**

### Taking this course Pass/Fail

Students may take the course P/F. However, in order to pass, students must do **all of** the following:

1. earn a minimum of 222 points on the quizzes and 222 points on the homework assignments
2. accumulate a minimum of 650 points in the class
3. not exceed the maximum number of unexcused absences (3)

### Anticipated Timetable

#### Weeks 1 – 3

##### Benward Introduction and Chapter 1

Notation: Pitch and Rhythm

Score reading and sight-singing practice

Quiz on Chapter 1 during Week 3 or 4

#### Weeks 4 – 6

##### Benward Chapters 2 - 3

Scales, Keys, and Intervals, sight-singing practice continues

Quiz on Chapters 2 & 3 during Week 7 (tbd)

#### Weeks 7 – 10

##### Benward Chapter 4

**Possible introduction to Chapter 5 (tbd)**

Chords and beyond

Quiz on Chapter 4 (possible partial Chapter 5 tbd) during finals week