

**MUS 507, Studies in Music History: Perspectives on Rhythm, Meter, and Form
from the History of Music
Theory Instructor: Nicholas Betson**

Open an introductory music theory textbook: all of its concepts come from other places, times, and uses. In this course we will explore these other scenes and consider how they can help us reframe music theory as an activity beyond a textbook encounter.

Our focus will be on theories of rhythm, meter, and form and our starting point such “Music 101” concepts as the beat, tempo, accent, time signature, motive, and phrase. We will begin with the theorists who, at the end of the 18th century, first tried to think all of these concepts together in an effort to revitalize the so-called tempo giusto system and demonstrate how

understanding meter also meant understanding a piece of music’s character, affect, and language-like structure. Looking beyond this moment of imagined common practice, we will then explore scenes that precede it and the long history, which continues until the present day, of doggedly remaining (all-too) faithful to it.

In doing this we will observe how music theory, far from being solely about “the music itself,” often responds to and, in turn, helps shapes broader cultural practices such as philosophies of time and motion; scientific disciplines such as mathematics, psychology, and cognitive science; and institutions of professional training such as musical conservatories. That said, we will also engage these historical theories by doing our own music analyses. Our goal will be both to complicate and enrich our understandings of the Common Practice tonal music at stake and to ask how fidelity to other scenes and repertoires might help us recognize the limitations of these seemingly universal concepts and free ourselves of their inherited cultural commitments.

Course work will consist of weekly readings drawn from both historical music-theoretical treatises and present-day scholarship; leading and participating in class discussions; and a final paper. Students are welcome to pursue either more culturally- or analytically-oriented projects.

This counts as a history course for MM and DMA students, and is primarily intended for performers. Because of the specific topic for this course in Spring 2023, this course may be used to satisfy the Theory course requirement pending GSC approval. Any students wishing to do this must email their request to the GSC (Music.GSC@stonybrook.edu) by Day 5 of Spring 2023 classes.

3 credits