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BERICHTE

University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam Conservatory
Research MA Program in Arts and Culture Track: Music Theory

Music theory at the intersection of music practice and scholarly study

The focal point of music theory is the structure and meaning of music. Music theorists work at ways of providing insight into these aspects so as to contribute, for example, to the schooling of musicians or musicologists. In this case, music theorists develop students' musical conceptions and sight-reading abilities, acquaint them with past and present principles and routines in composition, and in doing so also sharpen their aural skills. In the Netherlands, a music theorist is generally regarded as a qualified teacher who introduces students to the music profession at a conservatory or a university. Until recently the traditional education of music theorists in the Netherlands has consisted of a vocational program, that is, a teacher-training program offered at conservatories.

However, music theory is also a profession for *research*, research directed at three areas:

1. pedagogical practices (the development and study of teaching methods for music analysis, aural training, writing techniques and improvisation)
2. artistic practices (the development of compositional techniques, the interpretation of music) and
3. historiography (an understanding of music pedagogy and artistic practices of the past).

As a research discipline, music theory is thus located at the intersection of music practice and scientific study.

And finally, music theory itself is also *practice*. The term ›music theory‹ refers to a way of *thinking* about music. This thinking creates a framework in which music acquires meaning. In this sense, thinking is also *doing*. Music theory is always closely related to musical life and music history, and is in fact part of both. A music theorist who communicates professional knowledge is at the same an interpreter of music, operating in a field that includes musicians, composers, journalists, philosophers, scientists, and, not to be forgotten, listeners. It is within this field that the music theorist must position him- or herself, optimally combining professional knowledge with curiosity, erudition, originality, critical distance and rhetorical ingenuity.

The versatility of music theory as sketched above is fully addressed in a new study track, implemented in 2003, that focuses on the development of both practical and reflective music theory. Because of this goal, this new music theory program is offered

at two institutes: the Amsterdam Conservatory and the University of Amsterdam. Music Theory is a specific study program leading to a Master of Arts' degree at the University of Amsterdam, and is jointly offered by the University and the Conservatory. As long as certain requirements are met, the program is open to Music Theory bachelor graduates from the conservatory and to Musicology bachelor graduates of the university (see Pre-requisite programs and Application).

This Research MA program in Music Theory is geared both to music theory and to historical musicology. Today's music theorist should not only be well versed in his/her profession, but should recognize that this profession is the product of a long and complex history, including music history, social history and the history of science. A musicologist should realize that music has given rise to theoretical and analytical considerations, which in turn have functioned as interpretative frameworks for other musics. Even when music is not regarded as an independent ›text‹ but as a cultural practice, one cannot avoid situating music theory as a component of this practice. A theoretical vocabulary not only acts as a window upon music, but also has its *own* history and its *own* pragmatics, turning this window at the same time into a mirror. This master's program can thus contribute both to an in-depth understanding of music and to knowledge of oneself.

Background

After the Second World War, music theory developed into an independent academic discipline, primarily in the United States. This development was catalyzed by composers who saw music theory as a valid research domain and by music theorists who felt limited in their role as vocational trainers in the rudiments of music. New periodicals came into being, such as the *Journal of Music Theory* (Yale University, 1957) and *Perspectives of New Music* (Princeton University, 1961). During the years to follow, research programs were developed at numerous American universities. In 1977 a number of members of the American Musicological Society felt the need for an organization to specifically convey their interests and founded the Society for Music Theory. This professional association organizes conferences, facilitates diverse activities of her members and publishes two periodicals: *Music Theory Spectrum*, founded in 1979, and the electronic periodical *Music Theory Online*, founded in 1993.

In most of Europe, music theory is regarded as a domain of knowledge directed towards the vocational skills necessary to professional musicians. Conveying this knowledge is the main task of music theorists, whether one works at a conservatory or at a university. The absence of a research tradition in the field of music theory and analysis has long stood in the way of a European response to theoretical developments in the United States. In addition, language barriers and differences in tradition have perhaps impeded the exchange of ideas and research findings in Europe. However, the past decades have witnessed the founding of a number of new European platforms for music theorists. In 1989, various national associations joined to organize the European Music Analysis Conference (EuroMAC). In addition, European music theory has clearly been stimulated by various periodicals such as *Music Analysis*, founded in 1982, the French

Analyse Musicale, founded in 1985 and continued as *Musurgia* since 1994, and the German *Musik & Ästhetik*, founded in 1997.

In the 1990s, several new impulses energized Dutch music theory. In 1996 the periodical *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* was founded. Published three times a year by the Amsterdam University Press, this periodical, which includes articles and reviews in Dutch, English or German, quickly proved to be a leading forum for music theorists and musicologists both in the Netherlands and abroad. Then in 1999, the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory was established, followed that same year by the fourth EuroMAC. For the first time, this conference was held in the Netherlands, with the Rotterdam Conservatory and the above-mentioned newly founded association serving as hosts. The Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory has since organized an annual congress and small-scale symposia or study days on specific subjects. This association regularly works with similar associations in other countries and with the Royal VNM and the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, Belgium.

These relatively recent developments in the research of music theory and analysis in the Netherlands justify the institution of a new Master's program in music theory. Moreover, the Dutch Journal of Music Theory and the Dutch Society for Music Theory provide an infrastructure beneficial to music theory students. Both the periodical and the society offer students in the master's program an opportunity of gaining experience in their future profession and of becoming acquainted with peers and professional colleagues. Students also learn to assess the work of others and to orientate themselves as to current themes in this profession.

Aim of the study program

This master's program is geared to students who have already demonstrated considerable knowledge of music theory and analysis in their bachelor's program, as well as talent in conveying this knowledge to others. Students will learn to explore this research field, systematically and historically, and to independently chart various developments. They will become familiar with leading research paradigms and will learn to present their findings to a scholarly forum, both in essay form and at oral presentations. They will also be encouraged to investigate beyond their own discipline and to critically evaluate its basis assumptions and methods.

The program

First year:

Semester 1

Course: Music Analysis (10)

Course: Musicology of Western Music (10)

Semester 2

Tutorial: Music Theory and Research I (10)

Seminar 3: Intersection of the Arts (10)

Seminar 1: Historiography of Music Theory (10)

Seminar 2: Canon of the Arts and Sciences (10)

Second year:

Semester 1

Course: Philosophy of Music/Aesthetics (10)

Tutorial: Music Theory and Research II (10)

Tutorial: Advanced Analysis (10)

Semester 2

Master's thesis (30)

The two-year master's research program consists of three specialist courses in the master's program in musicology, three seminars and three tutorials. The degree program is completed with a written thesis in which the student reports on independent research. The three courses are Philosophy of Music/Aesthetics, Musicology of Western Music, and Music Analysis. Depending on a student's previous track, *Systematic and Cultural Musicology* may also be chosen instead of Music Analysis. The three seminars concentrate on research and theoretical developments in the arts. Two of the seminars – *Canon of Arts and Sciences* and *Intersection of The Arts* – are open to students from other master's programs. These seminars enable students to develop an interdisciplinary approach and focus on the position of their own profession within a broader perspective, scientifically, historically and philosophically. The third seminar – *Historiography of Music Theory* – views the history of music theory from the perspective of someone who wants to write about this subject. The tutorials *Advanced Analysis*, *Music Theory and Research I*, and *Music Theory and Research II* form a transition from the study program to the professional field. In the student catalog, these tutorials are described as »projects offering a learning experience in which student and teacher research a subject representing an area of scholarly interest of the faculty member in question.« In the tutorials *Music Theory and Research I and II*, students first examine a branch of music theory based on leading publications and then write a thorough review of a recent publication in this area. First-rate reviews may be submitted for publication in the *Dutch Journal of Music Theory*. A fixed part of these tutorials is participation in the yearly International Orpheus Academy for Music Theory in Ghent.

The master's thesis is the crowning proof of mastery and consists of a paper minimally equivalent to a substantial article for a scientific periodical. Work on the master's thesis takes six months and is supervised by two musicology staff members or by a staff member and a teacher of the Amsterdam Conservatory.

Prerequisite programs

Both university and conservatory students may qualify for the master's program Research in the Arts / Music Theory. The University of Amsterdam and the Amsterdam Conservatory offer two possible prerequisite programs:

1. A bachelor in musicology from the university. A minimum of 60 credits (ECTS, for: European Credit Transfer System) must be devoted to modules in the Music Theory bachelor program at the Amsterdam Conservatory. The required courses are *Counterpoint*, *Harmony* (practical and theoretical), *Analysis* and *Jazz Theory*. In addition, students receive extensive solfeggio and aural training.
NB. In order to attend modules at the Amsterdam Conservatory, students must pass an entrance exam in music theory. Information on the requirements for this entrance exam is available from the program coordinator and from music theory teachers at the Conservatory. They can also provide information on the contents of the modules.
2. A bachelor in music theory from the Conservatory. This degree requires 60 ECTS devoted to modules in the bachelor's program Musicology at the University of Amsterdam. The required modules are *Musicology of Western Music I-V*, *Academic Skills* and *Philosophy of Science*.

Students with an education equivalent to either of these two studies may also apply for admission to the Music Theory program.

Application

Prospective candidates for the master's program Research in the Arts / Music Theory must submit their application form *before April 1* to:

University van Amsterdam
Academische Zaken
Spuistraat 210
1012 VT Amsterdam

Please state »Application Research MA program in Arts and Culture«.

In addition to a completed application form, the following documents and information must be included:

- A certified copy of the bachelor's degree and grade reports of the bachelor courses followed.
- Entrance and graduation dates. A written motivation for the choice of this study, together with a proposal for a Master's thesis (1,000 words maximum).
- Letters of recommendation from a representative of the bachelor program and from the head of the department.

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