

Graduate 20th-Century Theory Exam

The graduate 20th-century theory diagnostic examination includes a short multiple choice written exam (taking ninety minutes). The exam focuses on the basic material used in post-tonal music: pitch class set nomenclature and manipulation, basic twelve-tone theory, post-tonal scales/modes, and rhythmic techniques.

Sample Questions

Example 1:

The musical score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of two staves: a right-hand staff (treble clef) and a left-hand staff (bass clef). A slur covers the first two measures. In the first measure, the left hand plays a triad of G2, B2, and D3, bracketed and labeled 'A'. In the second measure, the right hand plays a triad of F#4, A4, and C5, bracketed and labeled 'B'. In the third measure, the right hand plays a triad of F#4, A4, and C5, bracketed and labeled 'C'. In the fourth measure, the right hand plays a triad of F#4, A4, and C5, bracketed and labeled 'D'. The piano dynamic 'p' is indicated in the first measure.

1. Consider the pitches bracketed above the letters A, B, C, and D to belong to unordered pitch-class sets. How does D relate to A?
 - a. D is a transposition of A.
 - b. D is a transposed inversion of A.
 - c. D is the complement of A.
 - d. D is a subset of A.
 - e. None of the above.
2. Consider the pitches bracketed above the letters A, B, C, and D to belong to unordered pitch-class sets. How does C relate to B?
 - a. C is a transposition of B.
 - b. C is a transposed inversion of B.
 - c. C is the complement of B.
 - d. C is a subset of B.
 - e. None of the above.

Example 2:

The musical score for Example 2 consists of three staves. The top staff is a single treble clef staff for the voice, containing a melodic line with the lyrics "A leopard went a-round his cage". The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4 (marked with a forte 'f' dynamic), and then eighth notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, and A5. The piano accompaniment is shown in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The bass clef staff begins with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a whole note chord of F#3, C#4, and G#4. The treble clef staff begins with a whole note chord of F#4, C#5, and G#5. Both piano parts feature polytonal harmony, with the bass clef part playing chords in the key of D major (F# and C#) and the treble clef part playing chords in the key of A major (F# and C#).

3. The melodic pitches in the voice part of Example 2 belong to which of the following scales?
 - a. Dorian mode
 - b. Octatonic scale
 - c. Pentatonic scales
 - d. Phrygian mode
 - e. Whole tone scale.
4. Which term below best describes the harmonic structures in the piano part of Example 2?
 - a. Tone clusters
 - b. Tertian harmony
 - c. Quartal harmony
 - d. Polytonal harmony
 - e. Aleatoric harmony

Sample Resources

Sample Resources for the 20th-Century Theory Exam

Kostka, *Materials and Techniques of Post-Tonal Music*

Kostka/Payne, *Tonal Harmony: With and Introduction to Twentieth Century Music*

Lester, *Analytic Approaches to Twentieth-Century Music*

Roig-Francoli, *Understanding Post-Tonal Music*

N.B.: All sample resources listed are typical texts that are commonly used in undergraduate post-tonal music theory courses. The list is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive of the exam content. Any textbooks or notes from your undergraduate post-tonal music theory courses would also be excellent review sources.